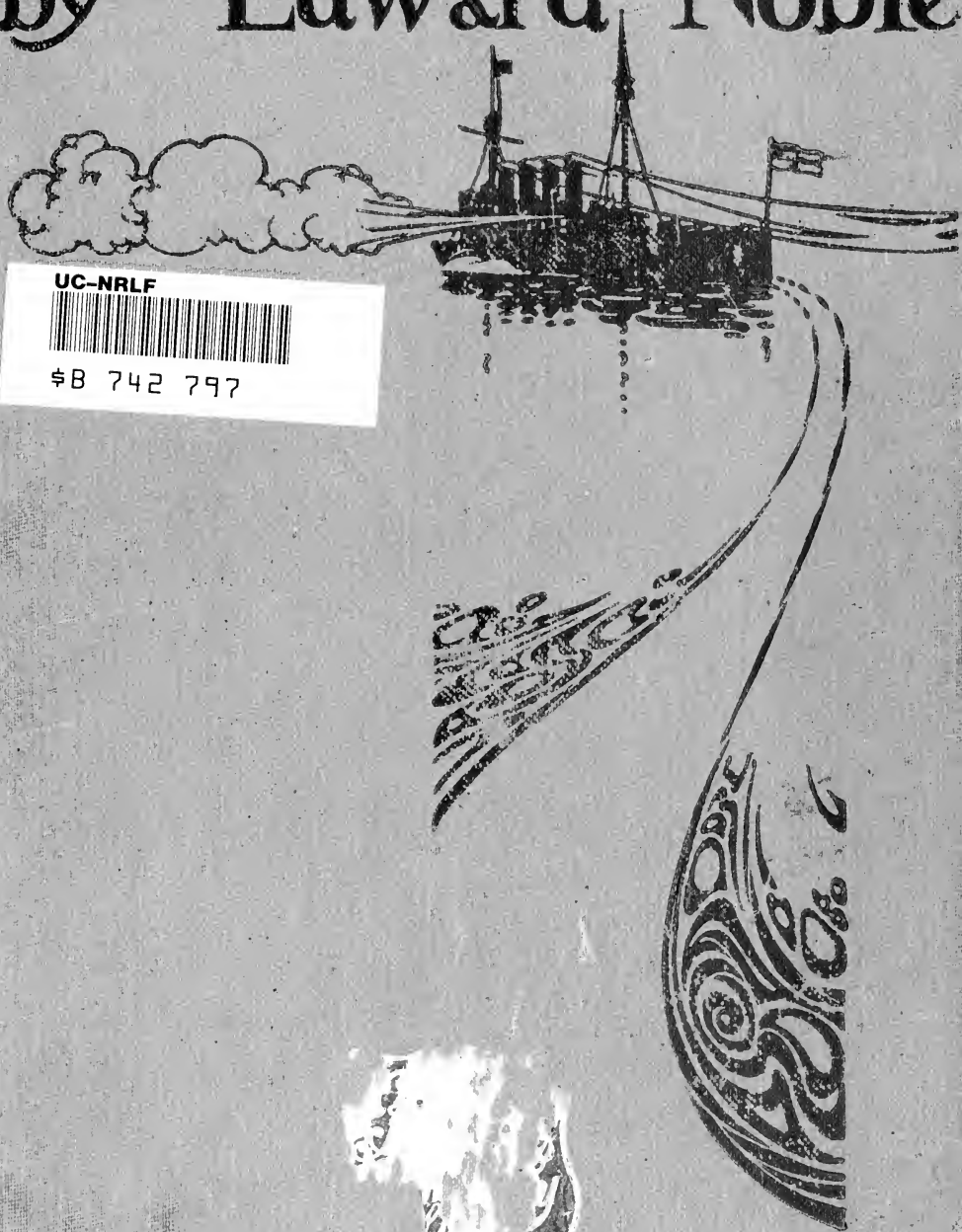


THE NAVAL SIDE

by Edward Noble



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THE NAVAL SIDE

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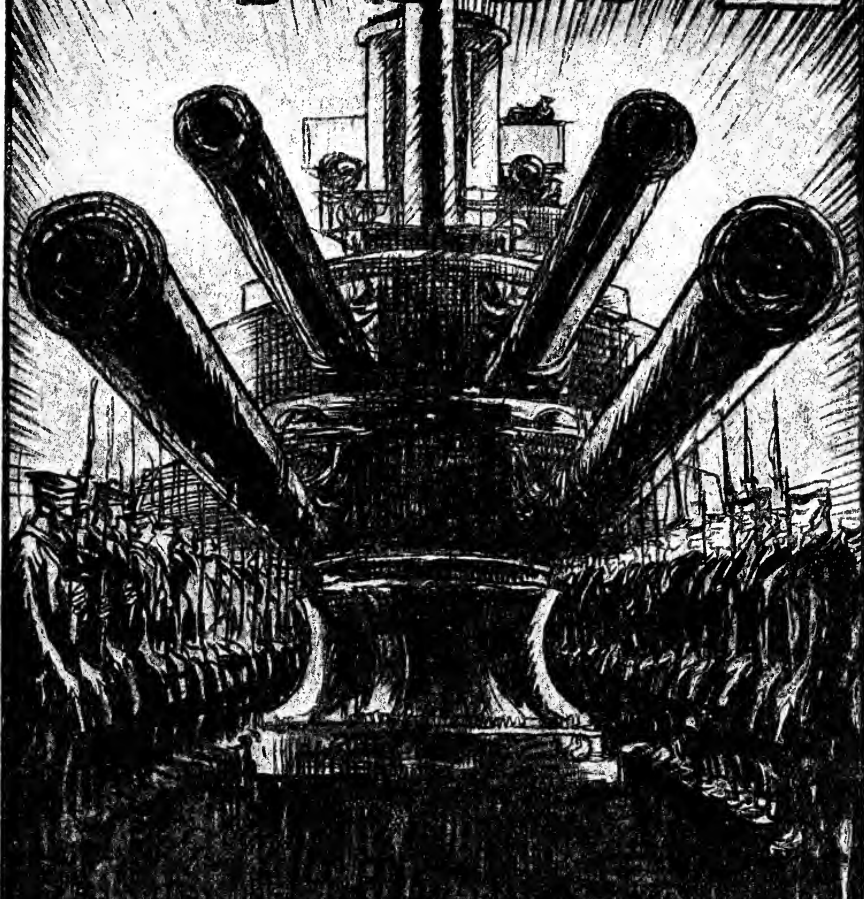
LIFTED CURTAINS

DUST FROM THE LOOM

THE BOTTLE-FILLERS

OUTPOSTS OF THE FLEET

THE NAVAL



SIDE

BY EDWARD NOBLE
CECIL PALMER HAYWARD
LONDON 13 BLOOMSBURY STREET

TO
ADMIRAL THE RT. HON. VISCOUNT JELlicOE OF SCAPA,
G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O.

TO WHOSE PRESCIENCE AND SPLENDID LEADING
WE, WHO PERFORCE REMAINED AT HOME,
OWE DEBTS WE CAN NEVER REPAY

AND
WERE ENABLED
TO PURSUE OUR ACTIVITIES
WITH TONGUE AND PEN WHILE HE LED AND FOUGHT.

D581
N6

NOTE

IN sending these pages to the press I should like to be allowed to record my thanks to the Navy and to all those officers, non-commissioned officers and men with whom I came in contact during the all too brief months occupied by my visits to the various sections of the Fleet and to the great Naval Centres.

From first to last, from sunny Osborne to the mists of the North, no hitch occurred, nor was there any prompting. I moved as I listed under the sign manual of the Admiralty. What I saw I saw with the eyes of a sailor who has dabbled also in paint and in engineering, and if I have read stress in the eyes of men engaged in this great battle for freedom, it has been the stress of an age living cheek by jowl with machines, the stress of enduring sacrifice—a sacrifice so long and rigorous in its process that one is amazed at the living force remaining to the actors.

Theirs is a drama of life and death, staged with marvellous precision, a *mise en scène* which is of iron and steel and H.E. shells, a stage which is the world . . . and the players are sailors.

They are men of a vast complexity, keen on all the games of life, from diplomacy to the methods by which a messroom sing-song can be made a success. I talked with men ranking from admiral to the lads at Shotley and Whale Island; with men who had fought at the Falklands, at Heligoland, at Jutland; I took notes and lived on ships which had passed through these great engagements, others which had

failed to climb the rock and boulder-strewn sides of the Peninsula . . . and I have written but this.

The measure of my gratitude to the Navy is burdened alone by my inability to set out in cold print a tithe of what was there, waiting for my pen.

EDWARD NOBLE.

ORE,

March, 1918.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
• <i>Waiting</i>	1
I. AUGUST, 1914	3
II. 894—1914	15
III. THE LADDER	32
IV. HIS MAJESTY'S BLUEJACKETS	53
<i>The Men of the Dark Red Crown</i>	71
V. NOORD HINDER	75
VI. THE ESCORT	99
VII. SURSUM CORDA	117
VIII. PRO PATRIA	132
<i>On the Fleet</i>	179
IX. THE RED ENSIGN	182
X. TRANSPORT	202
XI. JUTLAND AND AFTER	226
XII. THOSE WHO FIGHT	250
<i>Gathering the Devil's Grapes</i>	276

FIRST
EDITION
1918
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THE NAVAL SIDE

WAITING

*Down by the edge of Soundings
Is where the sailors lie,
Flat on the floor like groundlings
To see the ships go by . . .
Lift their heads to hear us,
Wave their arms awhile ;
There the dead men cheer us,
There the dead men smile.*

For round about in Soundings
Is where the sleuth-hounds ply,
Nosing their way like groundlings,
There where the mine-fields lie . . .
North to the floes they wallow,
South to the Line they glide
Sure as the laws they follow,
Keen as the seas are wide.

They come from English counties,
From Scot and Irish clans,
Men who receive no bounties,
Yet aglow with hopes and plans . . .
To add to England's glory
New deeds for England's fame,
To build anew her story,
To pulse and throb and flame.

THE NAVAL SIDE

They come with jest and laughter
To lay the guns and sing,
Ready for dance or slaughter,
Instant to watch and spring ;
These are the men who guard us
While thousands here still sleep,
Keeping the seas that ward us,
Smiling at those who weep.

Trust to your sons, O England,
Faith for the unseen Fleet !
Your brother, son and husband
Are moving on their beat ;
Trailing skirts in the " Angle,"
In gale and sleet and mist,
Sweeping the mine-field tangle
Laid by the Mailed Fist.

*Down by the Edge of Soundings
Is where the sailors lie,
Flat on the floor like groundlings
To see the ships go by . . .
Lift their heads to hear us,
Wave their arms awhile ;
There the dead men cheer us,
There the dead men smile.*

CHAPTER I

AUGUST, 1914

The Naval Tradition—Its Heroic Spirit—The Genesis of its Manhood.

“Let England maintain her Empire of the Seas, and she may send her Ambassadors to the Courts of Europe and demand what she pleases.”—NAPOLEON.

NIGHT had shut down upon the solitudes which lie between our eastern coast and the sand-dunes which fringe the flats of Belgium and Holland. The North Sea lay under it, screened by clouds and restless—churning white in the shallows, sullen, heaving where the chart showed greater depth.

East and west of it lightships and stations pricked the dark with warning signals, reiterating the night through in white and red flashes or occulting stare their message to those who moved. Ships came out of the distance as on all nights during past years—lighted in some cases, unlighted in others. They pushed on to their ports, as always, carrying the food and merchandise of an island people—a nation grown so large that import had become a necessity.

“I am the Kentish Knock!” laughed one, “and I the Outer Gabbard”; “Spurn Point, am I”; “St. Abbs, Rattray, Stronsay, Skerries,” they cried; with stabs of light—“British all!” And on the other hand, deep in eastern haze, came answering gleams from Ostende, Maas, Texel; answering shouts from Nordeney, Heligoland, Horn’s Reef and distant, questioning Naze. “What of the night?”

they seemed to say. "Is it peace or is it war for England?" "Is it the gloom and blood of Armageddon, or the joy of peaceful penetration, cozenry, and sweating?" "Dare she fight who has no men aligned to guard her, or does she again take risks, challenge the War-Lord and set her Fleet upon the seas to bring him low?"

The nations jeered or cheered. Some, remembering Napoleon, looked out with hope to stir them; others frowned. Peace or war; war or peace?—who among them knew which of the twain would stand with to-morrow's noon.

Through the grey night grey ships pushed onward. Sometimes the stars lay over them, sometimes the setting moon, white, unveiled by fleeting clouds. They moved with the British answer.

With open throttles they slid on foam to take up stations out there across the gates of the North. Giants some of them, pigmies others; but all alert, ready, by God's grace and man's untiring effort, to accept the German challenge.

Here came mammoths of the first line; there battle-cruisers, speedy as the yards of Britain could build them; here the scouts and whippets; there, awash in the dawdling sea, their conning-towers lifted against the farther blackness, those dim shapes which were for the first time to be proved in battle—the submarines of fact and fancy.

They came from festival, a pageant spread for their King to appraise; from the softly looming hills which form the background of Spithead and Southampton Water. Here they had lain with flags to deck their grimness in the sun, the lamps of fairy-land to pick them out at night. Here they had seen the glittering convoy of their Sovereign Chief as he passed them in review, helped with the roar of guns

and cheering, and looked for leave when the show was ended.

Instead of leave came war; instead of the brief hand-grasp, a word which brought them into action and constituted them the nation's saviours.

Far off, in the Halls which house our lawgivers, the choice between peace and war had been made. Through death only could the British people live. Through sacrifice and danger, alarms from air and under sea, perils on land and water, weariness, agitation, travail, only was it possible to lift the head and smile. In those first dim hours the thing fronted the nation like a nightmare. Some there were who openly shouted for peace at the price of the nation's word, some—and they are clamant always—announced that no cause justified war, and quoted Christ and the prophets in proof.

But the Fleet recked nothing of these. Jar and wrangle are not to its mind. The arguments of sophists leave it cold. It is drilled and learned in the arbitrament of Force; versed in qualities gained at Osborne and Dartmouth, Shotley, Portsmouth and Whale Island, in gunnery schools and classrooms—qualities known as tradition, and is steeped in it to the eyes. It is manned and commanded by men descended from the throned heroes of the sea—Nelson, Drake, Collingwood, Duncan, and a score now in Valhalla. Shades of the Great stand over it, urging "There is nothing the Navy cannot do"—reminding it of Nelson's phrase: ". . . Now, had we taken ten sail, and allowed the eleventh to escape, when it had been possible to get her, I could never have called it well done."

The fatuous benevolence of a nation occupied since the war of 1870 in cutting down expenditure on an army, which, in all conscience, was small

enough and might presently be needed, produced a shrug of despair. It seemed that England was busy improving herself off the face of the earth. At moments it seemed that those who watched her were careless of their heritage, content that they, at all events, were safe from want, and were more concerned with nostrums than with the honest physic of preparation.

An overburdened Merchant Service groaned under the task of feeding England—*bene* ; it is ordained that those who carry burdens shall groan. The merchant sailor refused to carry his burden, refused longer to be exploited, cajoled and kicked, and took himself by driblets into other hells, into the service of other nations, gave up the sea and sat down to die in the almshouses or gutter—*bene* ; by a merciful Providence there was a glut of foreign sailors, persons with sheath-knives and ringlets, and no English, aching for employment in the ships of England. Let them forthwith carry the food great England demands.

There were no granaries in the kingdom—*bene* ; but there were granaries in the Kingdom of Heaven. "In My Father's house are many mansions." We, who had dared to draw a picture of what would occur if the world-lust of Germany made head, were told to keep that in mind ; others reiterated the advice culled at some platform that we might sleep comfortably in our beds. Granaries ! Were not the ships we had manned with stilettoed Levanters and plaintive "Dutchmen" * competent to bring home the grain we required ; or was it suggested "our sailors were cowards" ?

Those who wielded the Press whips smiled and stung. Was not a "Dutchman" as good a sailor

* A "Dutchman," as all the world knows, is merely a euphemism for those who say Ja for Yes.

as a Britisher?—so they phrased it, pandering to the lords who held them chained.

Only in a lazy and fluctuating fashion did we recognise the necessity of keeping the Navy supreme. And that we accomplished in spasms and jerks after soul-stirring speeches had been made by those who ruled us whenever the German ogre chose to stand forth clad in shining armour, or to clang the sword he wore always on his hip. Panic legislation the critics called it, and promptly were dubbed "scaremongers" by those who knew it was true. These self-appointed arbiters of the nation's destiny derided openly each phrase pronounced by a scaremonger. Another quip blossomed when scaremonger became worn. "Amateur!" they said, and smiled from their deathless pose. "Amateur strategists! Beware, or you will bring about a European war." They forgot the old Latin tag *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, or perhaps they chose to keep it hid.

Yet, despite all these bickerings, the Navy managed to exist and to maintain a certain degree of supremacy. But thousands in that peaceful period, 1870—1914, shook their shackles even as the men of the Merchant Service shook theirs, and found new fields for their energies, new flags beneath which it was permissible to stand at the salute, new promise where all had been anathema, and the very name of Englishman was provocative of the sneers of half the world.

Had it not been for Osborne and the *Britannia*, Dartmouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham in those days, the Navy would have been depleted even as the Merchant Service. They conspired to fill the gaps, beckoned to more distant centres, and bid men remember. The memory of Nelson, Drake, and the wondrous "wooden walls" was not to be eradicated from the nation's thoughts by the action of loud-

voiced tub-thumpers either of Parliament or the Press. The very air of these islands is tuned and whetted to remind boys that beyond it is the sea. All our stupidly-strung facts are facts gleaned from great memories of the past. The naval legend is written large on the boyish mind; it throbs and burns in spite of our wise saws. We are conscious, despite the Little Navy school and the Little Englanders, of a certain heritage which is ours; of giants among the lesser men; of ships which fought at great odds and won; of admirals who sought each other in battle and engaged, broad pennant to broad pennant, fought, changed into less battered craft, and fought again, until one of them died.*

We are conscious of great men who refused to obey. Of Howard of Effingham who refused to obey his Queen's order to dismantle a part of the fleet he had prepared to meet the Armada; chose to keep it in being at his own expense rather than trust to stupid rumours—born, perhaps, in Spain. Of Nelson, with telescope lifted to his blind eye, telling his flag-captain he could not see the signal of his chief which ordered him to break off battle. We are conscious, too, that Nelson's blindness on that day meant victory instead of disaster . . . and we visualise ourselves as Nelsons of the future, forgetting altogether his wounds in the glory of his magnificent end.

So we perceive that in one way or another the Navy managed to keep manned and armed—managed, indeed, to maintain some preponderance over our most potent enemy.

It knew, as those others did not or would not know, that upon it would fall the burden of defence when war came, and that it would be tied more or less

* Van Trompe and Spragge.

to the British apron-strings. It remembered quite calmly, and with some sarcasm, what that would mean. It had seen it happen elsewhere. The South African war was a wonderful object-lesson for those who would read how the nation could treat its soldiers and sailors when peace was won. It remembered that small army at the Cape, left to face the menace of a State which intended to push the *rooineks* into the sea ; how the pacifists bit and slanged and rendered it impossible to send it aid ; how it would all happen again, in precisely the same dreary, tub-thumping fashion when the German menace broke upon Europe.

We had a small but incomparably splendid force ready, but nothing to back it. It would be sent to hold up the German machine, to scotch his wheels, while we and our Allies prepared. It would be beaten, bruised, perhaps wiped out in that ordeal ; but it would stand as the men in South Africa stood while pacifists raved of the atrocities it committed and harangued of the nobility of our enemy. And to the Navy would be assigned the task of holding the seas, feeding, clothing, and safeguarding the convoys which found it in materials of war ; precisely as in the old, old days of South African travail.

It would hold the seas while some one prepared an army, forged guns, made rifles, shells, and all the countless instruments which did not then exist. It would hold the seas in spite of all the three P's * could say or do. It would hold it in spite of those tangling apron-strings ; in spite of Germany and her vaunted preparations to swoop ; in spite of Heligoland, Nordeney, and the island bases across the sea ; in spite of coalition, if that came, of North-land nations and North-land navies to swell the German Fleet. It would hold or it would die.

* Professors, Pacifists, Politicians.

That is the Navy's idiom.

Through the grey night grey ships pushed onward. Sometimes the stars shone down on them, sometimes the setting moon, white, unveiled a space by the sailing clouds.

Was it peace or was it war ? In spite of handicaps the British Fleet moved out to give the British answer.

The Lord who ruled it had spoken words it understood, and now it fretted the North Sea grey with paths of white ; set miniature whirlpools frothing and left them echoing to the clang of picks and shovels. Sometimes the steam roared brazen-tongued upon the ships ; sometimes the flick of shroud or stay made the only sound. Sometimes funnels flared, as it were, in unison, glow beyond glow ; sometimes smoke curtained them. With bulkheads closed, crews at stations, shells at hand, the grey ships strung through the night, came to the gates of the North and shut them.

No longer now was a question of how the war would end ; but when. No longer now the tantalising question of what Germany would do with her fleet, but how soon would she do it.

England was decadent—well, who knows ? She was fat, smug, steeped in luxury, too lazy and indifferent to move—perhaps. She was the prey of puritan and crank, of persons in the pay of cultured Deutschland ; she was troubled, tumbled, sore . . . yet her Fleet had slammed the door on North Sea exits.

Scouts were out to find opposition, some semblance of the bombast which had rung ; but annihilation scarcely appealed to an enemy accustomed to pray for the day which should be for her a *dies non*. Therefore Germany set back her time-table, laid mines, and retired behind her forts and bastions at Heligoland and Kaiser Wilhelm Canal.

The bid she had made for world-power, the boasting *weltmacht oder neidergang*, and bumpers to *der Tag* were pushed away before what was. The whole plot and edifice of her War-Lord's dream was crushed before a gun had fired or a man had fallen. It was as though two great chess-players had fenced and parried until one of them called check. No other move appeared but to sacrifice the queen—and that Germany refused. Behind her mine-fields and her forts she clung jealously to her queen and seemed to smile, while we tied knots and passed chains of verbiage about our Fleet which only the law could explain.

And these men who closed the northern gate on the Kaiser's raiders—what of them?

They are of those who know their mind, are trained in deeds, not words; who go out at the bidding of an aerial message, unquestioning, instant for obedience; who talk together by means of flags, wig-wags, and lights that flash out at an immense speed meaningless words which, in the hands of an expert, become orders; who are ready at a moment's notice to say good-bye to the women who are their kin and start for the ice-bound north or south, for the deadly gulf which lies to the east of Baghdad's vaunted railway, for the jungle or mountain-top, river or sea service, and call the thing upon which they are engaged a "stunt."

They are the men who have come unscathed through the furnace of a modern sea fight and write to their homes of the "topping" time they experienced, of the heroism of a pal, but are silent on the heroism which was theirs; who stand alert amidst the din of bursting shells, a cigarette between their lips, or dive without hesitation into the black sea to rescue a drowning shipmate.

They are the lineal descendants of that glorious blend of the Naval and Merchant Service sailor who fought and knew how to die in Elizabethan times ; who pushed across sea in ships of no greater tonnage than a Thames barge, bristled on meeting a Spaniard and compelled the Dutch to strike topsails when saluting on the seas which ring our land.

They are the descendants of Howard, Lord of Effingham, of Drake, Anson, Rodney, St. Vincent, Collingwood, Nelson and the queued, crimped, press-ganged sailormen who fought and won our battles in ships called galleys, caravels, corvettes, frigates, and line-of-battle ships ; when the Cinque Ports found our Navy for us and Napoleon dreamed of invading England in boats propelled by oars. And there, it seems, the likeness ends.

A sailor in these ships of ours is a composite blend of the sailor as we knew him and an engineer. He is the R.E. of the sea. A man of infinite capacity, long service, and the endurance of a stoic without the stoic's pabulum.

You may account yourself lucky if you score off a sailor, for, by long association with all sorts and conditions of men, cities and environments, he is passed master in the art both of defence and attack. He knows the world as few others can hope to know it. He has been behind the scenes in many a European and Eastern " raffle," and has learned precisely why it is so difficult to walk on stilts.

He uses strange words, the gift of many lands, and interlards his conversation, if you can pin him down, with phrases which would have captured Horace and held him bound. *Curiosa felicitas !* True ; but with it often a condemnatory pat which takes the sting from pedantry.

In the days of wooden walls, if we are to credit

those who have chronicled them, a sailor's language consisted largely of such phrases as "shiver my timbers" and the like. He made as much use of these as he made of the twitch with which he rescued his breeches from downfall and himself from disaster. But to-day one misses this stage-craft and finds in its place a curious kinship with the Army.

Both speak in clipped sentences, very much to the point; talk of "duds" when they mean, sometimes, shells which did not explode, and "scraps" when they refer to the Battle of Jutland or the Heligoland Bight; "juice" when they wish to infer motive power; and for no apparent reason, almost against their judgment, speak of submarines as "the trade."

You feel at once on coming among these folk that they are products of an age which has taken to wings and can fly—or can, at a pinch, sink down to sit on the bed of the sea while they think things out. You will see that they live sometimes in need of Boynton suits, sometimes in a stewpan where they may not stand upright; that sometimes they have no air and sometimes sufficient to blow them sky high; that it is necessary to scrape the paint off their cabins before going into action lest the steel should take fire.

You know that he is a blend of soldier and sailor as once was the prerogative of the Jollies alone; that in addition he is blacksmith, moulder, gunner, doctor, electrician, and can run a torpedo with the next; that he can play the piano or fiddle as often as his forebears played the accordion, that he wears his hair short where they wore it long; that he can sail or row with the best; build a boat if need be, or a pontoon, fit her with sails, masts, or an oil engine as readily as he will put a new point to a marline spike. And you will discover that the one calling of which he knows nothing is what he terms lawyering.

Then, when you have assimilated all this, you will find that he may take you into his confidence and explain the parts of a thing he calls a "mouldy," why it is wise to wear list slippers in the magazine, and perhaps, if you are very painstaking and seductive and flaunt the right order, what he thinks of Fritz; or, as you sit together smoking like chimneys, his opinion of Marschall von Bieberstein, especially with regard to his speech at the Hague Peace Conference in 1907.

He will read it *in extenso* with his pipe for pointer. "Military acts," said this prophet, "are not ruled exclusively by the stipulations of an international law. There are other factors. Conscience"—he will emphasise this—"good sense, and the sentiment of duties imposed by the principles of humanity, will be the surest guide for the conduct of seamen, and will constitute the most efficacious guarantee against abuse. The officers of the German Navy—I say it with a high voice—will always fulfil in the strictest manner the duties which flow from the unwritten law of humanity and civilisation . . . As to the sentiments of humanity and civilisation, I cannot admit that any Government or country is superior to that which I have the honour to represent." *

And when he has finished reading he will tell you how the German squares that gem with the action of a Government which ordered the torpedoing of *Lusitania*.

He may, indeed, so far relax as to tell you that the speech was eye-wash, and the sinking a bit of "the real thing" for which the Crown Prince sighed in 1911, and explain in his airy way, while the boilers throb and hum beneath his cabin, "that's why we're up against 'em."

* "Sea Law and Sea Power" (Gibson Bowles).

CHAPTER II

894—1914

The Birth of the Fleet—Shipbuilding and Arsenal— Forging the Weapon.

THE dawn of history shows Great Britain struggling with Northland raiders, striving sometimes with success, sometimes with disaster, to keep free the seas which wash her shores.

It was against the depredation of the Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians—Norsemen as we termed them—and the use they made of sea-power that England rather more than one thousand years ago built her first navy. It was a navy of small vessels, boats, propelled by oars and sail, carrying soldiers, who, it appears from records, always stood erect and were armed with bows and arrows, spears, battle-axes.

For about one hundred and eleven years prior to that time the British Islands, France, and even Italy, had been perpetually raided by the confederacy of pirates known as the Danes. We had seen our lands laid waste, our cities burned, men, women, and children slaughtered, our country desolate or in the hands of men of the winged helm. These sea-folk swept our coasts as the Huns had swept Europe. They came upon us with torch and rapine, singing heroically of their gods and their Valhalla, and carried our women into captivity.

At that time Alfred the Great had been defeated by them and driven into hiding at Athelney. For

more than a hundred years the country had suffered and paid tribute; but now he emerged from the silences and broke upon the conquerors with plans which should make the kingdom his, the nation strong as never before.

With the army he had organised during those months of hiding he drove the Danes into the sea and built the first English Navy. Three hundred ships were his new fighting force, divided into three squadrons. One he placed on the east coast, one on the west, and one on the north; then for a period England had peace.

These little ships of a thousand years ago were but the infant attempt of an infant nation—a nation striving to retain what it had of civilisation, its homes, and fields for the ploughing. They had their captains and their admirals—obeyed a primitive discipline. They had their flags, their buglers, those who sung their praises and their plaints. They had, too, their armaments—their bows and arrows for distant fighting, their spears and knives and battle-axes for the deadly *mêlée*. They had their serried rows of shields, all burnished and shining in the sun, stowed in a line where in later years we stowed hammocks.

They had their rowers too, and over them the men who drove with staves those who failed to put full weight on the oars. The line between those who propelled and those who fought was marked as now; but they moved alike to sacrifice in order that people who lived at ease in towns, who knew nothing of the sea and ships, should remain safe from invasion even as in the days of Armageddon.

Then came the reign of a king who was unready or indifferent to the question whether England were better ruled by this nation or another. It seemed

perhaps, easier to call to the Northmen, bring them together at a feast and slay them when they were drunk with wine, than to fight them with the arrows and swords of shipmen in a navy which would not keep the seas without great difficulty and a vast business of preparation.

And when the massacre was complete the English people sat down to taste the vengeance of its Danish overlord, who exacted an eye for an eye, and for a period of seventy years continued to harry the land with those means of repression in which he put faith.

England's kings were driven afield, her warriors slain, her churches wrecked or given to Northmen priests and monks, and all that fair land which was her heritage parted among the Danes. Not until the Norman Conqueror bribed them finally in 1074 to leave England in peace did they surrender their hold and take in place of it the reinstituted tribute known as *Danegeld*.

Then Norman William, himself of Danish origin and descendant of Rollo, who in 911 had overrun Neustria, Normandy, set about girdling our coasts with the little ships which alone could give us peace. And again, for a space, the nation breathed, went about its affairs, and was able to sleep comfortably in its bed at night.

The ships, indeed, were still of infant building, but they were staunch, and now had a new enemy, another king, to fight. History shows us a ding-dong picture. When our fleet was supreme, peace and prosperity followed. When we were less than supreme, the nation suffered.

As an island people we learned our lesson early and forgot it with equal ease. As an island people we no doubt thrilled to the news which filtered slowly

on ears attuned to hope when Sluys was won. "Thirty thousand Frenchmen slain and drowned, two admirals killed"; "Two hundred and thirty French ships captured . . . Loss on the British side inconsiderable . . .": it sounds like the reports to which of late we have become accustomed. And on the morrow, or the morrow beyond that, weary weeks and months after the slain were at rest, little peeps behind the scene appeared. "The English attacked. They came on in invincible array, with the wind and sun behind them so that the French could not see. And the English archers galled the French at the outset. . . ." So, paraphrased from Hume, stands the record of what was whispered and shouted in the villages and towns of our fathers. "The French could not see!" As with our ships at Coronel, and later at Jutland, so with the French at Sluys in 1340—for to-day the sun no longer stands still at the prayer of man while nations fight to the death for victory.

All those little ships with castles on stem and stern, carrying two and three masts equipped with fighting tops, open as a lifeboat and crowded with men who rowed and fought, were the ships upon which we relied. Without them, we had learned, was no peace, no security, for a people whose coasts were washed by the sea. The sea had come to be dreaded as the road over which in a few days armies could be transported; we had learned to understand that it was the road whence slaughter, rapine, and destruction issued; that if we would remain free we must be strong upon it—stronger than those who otherwise would assail us.

When the two Papal Bulls were promulgated in 1493 dividing the New World between Portugal and Spain, and those two Powers claimed also the sovereignty of the seas, by which alone the two

Americas could be approached, the way was paved for the Elizabethan wars, for greater sea strength, for the filibustering expeditions, as they have been called, of Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher, Hawkins and a host of others, and for the immense effort of a Spanish Armada which, nearly one hundred years later, attempted to curb the liberties of Englishmen.

The story of Howard, Drake, Frobisher, Wynter, and Seymour is but one more chapter of the heroic struggle of an island nation to maintain its freedom on the seas and of its slowly growing Navy. So, too, the fights with Van Tromp and de Ruyter, with Tourville, Villeneuve—all the massed force of Spain and France, culminating at Trafalgar—were but incidents, ever increasing in scientific precision, strength of ships and armaments, by which the British people have survived and built the power to fight to-day.

Those little ships of our infant Navy, open to the seas, propelled by rowers, carried men with like desires to those who worked on shore. It was not for fun the ships were built and the men took service, but because for an island people the sea is the highway by which it carries to other countries the fruits of its labour in field and shop and factory. Because without that highway, the greater the nation becomes the sooner will it starve. In the days of Sluys and the Norsemen raiders the land was self-supporting; but now statisticians tell us that without our highway in six weeks the nation would starve.

So we come from infant doings through adolescence to a manhood of strenuous and heroic life; thence again, after one of those long pauses during which the nation was urged to beat its swords into ploughshares and the lion who was our guardian seemed to sleep, we came to the verge of that moment for which our enemies prayed.

We slept. We dreamed. We fought. We were decadent. The first six months of 1914 found us couched ; the last would see us flayed *und Deutschland über alles*.

In all soberness those early days of 1914 found us holding out palm leaves when we should have been preparing guns. A man-o'-war was looked upon and called a devil's symbol by those who knew that without such symbols we had little use for symbolism.

So there was but small stir in the British shipyards in those months of doubt and loud-voiced argument immediately preceding the war. We were busy indeed as never before since the days of Cromwell's ikon smashers, but without a Cromwell to lead us. Words were heard, words, words—some fine, and some merely stupid. Bricks were in the air, churches reduced to cinders, not because they held ikons, but because in some weird fashion they hindered the advance of the sex we worship, love, and sometimes dare to chide. A Government of all the talents was looking on and seeking to find such hen-roosts as chanced to have been passed by in earlier robbings.

England was busy improving herself off the face of the earth, as certain cynics averred. She was busy compelling the unorganised to part with the plunder they had acquired and handing it in dribblets to the organised, who, like the Romans, clamoured always for more. She saw clearly enough, as others saw, that things were not as they should be ; that when we pulled down slums it was not wise to build up barracks—yet she built them so that they shut out all light and air from those who must dwell in them.

She was at the close of a period which had been noisy with aspiration, and already she was bemused. The nation had been talked to, scolded, wept over,

and had turned a deaf ear uppermost and gone to sleep. It had been promised the moon or the millennium—it does not matter which—and it refused all substitutes even as the hucksters prayed.

As in the days of Ethelred, but with less excuse, when the Navy had swept the seas clear of enemies and made it possible to live in peace, it had taken peace to its bosom, shut its eyes and tied bandages about its ears lest by chance it should see or hear some ghost of the truth.

Amidst these alarms Capital, the bugbear of those who talk most of peace, became uneasy. It was being deflected, going overseas, but not to the Dominions. And to counter-balance these filterings the British banks were being made to carry the burden of the debts of Germany. Perhaps it paid them better than to encourage industry in a country where industry and thrift were assailed. Perhaps in a world of speculation it was easier to work with steel that was malleable than with steel that might fly. Bills of exchange on an institution so vigorous as the Dresdener Bank might be safely handled; but in a world where chaos seemed imminent, to promote new industries, or to bolster up those which required further capital, was to indulge in speculation.

Nevertheless, there existed in the land of mists and grey stone far in the north certain leaders of industry who still had faith in the ultimate necessity of ships and guns. One could not blame them for this when it is remembered that to become pessimist is to court disaster. Your pessimist cannot rule a shipyard, nor an arsenal, nor any of the allied trades. He must be an optimist as well as an organiser; a believer in self if not in Government—a martinet if you will, a man not subject to spasms.

Stability, endurance, and to this end faith, are

essential if ships and guns are to be built and forged by a people who have forsworn war and taken to promiscuous fisticuffing *joci causa*.

Therefore, if for no other reason than to keep together their staff, shipyards of the Tyne, the Clyde, and elsewhere had continued to build ships of war, which, perhaps, certain nations over sea would pay for and hail to their flags. It was the prerogative of men behind the scenes in European adventure to believe that a time was coming when the Mother Country would require these ships. They might not trust to the millennium which had been spoken of while afar off, perhaps by telepathy, and drummed into the arena of polemical strife. They were conversant with the jodelings of Bismarck's Boswell,* had heard of the telegram of Ems and other tintinabulations of the man of blood and iron. For that reason, if for no other, it is conceivable they thought it wise to have ships on the stocks which His Majesty might require when "the day" dawned.

Newcastle held some of them, the Clyde held others, and at the end of July, 1914, a few strokes of the pen moved them from the control of friend and enemy alike and brought them under the white ensign.

I came upon Newcastle in black darkness, when the city looked like a smudged canvas of the Day of Judgment, and the rain pattering from glum heavens strove to extinguish the fires that still burned. Central Station echoed to the fall of shot, and now and then to a dull crash, as of a shell. But rain and trucks made that bombardment, while jets of steam hissed straight at the glazed roof, as though it strove to still the clatter.

Then a porter of the North British service, a

* Busch.

bright-faced girl, bifurcated, smiling as no man ever yet smiled on man, came to carry my luggage, laughed when I objected to women hiking loads, found a little truck and trundled it to the lift, where a magic key unlocked all doors in an hotel already declared full.

So, too, on the next morning, when a thin drizzle curtained the city as with steam, I came upon the Armstrong naval yard, found it open, ready to display its wonders.

Five years ago this birthplace of ships did not exist; but, like Alfred at Athelney, the Elswick firm had faith in British manhood, faith in British sea-power, and set to work to prepare a yard where they might build great ships which presently the nation would require.

The site they chose took in that bend of the Tyne at Walker, which gave a greater stretch of river surface for launching. The foreshore was high, steep-to, as the phrase goes—Armstrong's decided to level the hills. The river was too shallow at this bend to permit giant ships alongside—Armstrong's arranged to deepen it. So, while palms and olive branches were being extended, waved, proffered, great navvies got to work on the hills, as in Culebra Cut at Panama, sliced away the land in terraces, blasted and tore at mother earth until a plain lay where once the hills had smiled, a plain whereon presently it would be possible to erect "shops," building slips and the offices of a giant industry.

The place became at once an anthill for energy—a space dotted with men and machines which never were still, who by day and by night worked in the light of flares which threw long tongues of fire upon the dark. Dun-coloured earth, boulders, bedrock, were torn away, swung on long-armed cranes to the

lines of clay-coated trucks, and carried by them snorting, with gusts of steam and shrill screams, to the waiting hoppers which lay ready at the jetties. Then again the redundant earth moved on. Far off to the mouth of the river these hoppers steamed, past Wallsend, Jarrow, North and South Shields, until at Tynemouth they escaped the sheltering piers and plunged in North Sea rollers. Far, far out they carried their cargoes of rock and stone and clay, paused, released the chains which held the doors, hove taut, and returned hungry for more.

Beside the river frontage, too, giant dredgers worked, groaning, tearing at the ooze and shingle of its bed. The clang and jar of steel buckets vied with thud and rattle of excavators on land. The men were clad in oilskins on the river front, in yellow fustian on the terraced shore. The noise they made was that of a race of giants, the roar of it as though the scarred earth groaned; yet when one looked from the shipping a race of marionettes seemed slowly to wrestle with the hills—the blows of pick and maul, the crunch of iron claws, the jar of trucks winding downward, backing up, tilting, slobbering, seemed small, indefinite as the march of clay-coloured atoms wheeling barrows of clay-coloured earth down planks which looked like wires strung taut against the shrinking land.

Yet the hills grew less and less in height, the terraces moved always further back; the jar of the excavators, the wailings of labouring locomotives, the hiss and drift of steam, ever became less strident from the widening wharf; even as the men on tug and dredger, striving to make deep the channel, became ever smaller from the land.

Later the foreshore aped a giant pin-cushion. A line of monster pins were set to buttress back the



THE BRIDGE OF AN OLD-TIME BATTLESHIP.



THE JOLLY WHO WAKES US.

wharf, to plug and stencil, as it seemed, the whole vast frontage as with a pattern. Stays these; ties and girders set in mother earth to render it more stable, more competent to carry without sagging the weights which presently would lie upon it—the great ships which presently would lean against its wall; and amidst these struts and pins other clay-daubed men climbed and walked like their marionette brothers upon the succulent clay of the hills.

. And in the midst of this striving, with no more warning than had been heard by workers in other fields, came war.

One week of indecision, questioning pause, fear lest England should still remain blind, sunk as the sophists appeared to desire—then decision, instant, overwhelming, and the knowledge to that great firm of Novocastrians that they had not ridden for a fall. The nation, suddenly alive to facts long scoffed at, would need that yard and others. It was not yet ready, but it shot into being when war had come. It leaped to the call, glowing by night, a cloud of steam and dust by day. The Tyne ran seaward, laden still with swept-up garbage; it shimmered at night to the red fires it saw, drew pictures when it was placid, planned phantasm when it was wild. Ever the land became more packed with workers, ever the jar and turmoil grew—even as in other centres, far off, where moribund works became warrens and the ways which led to them dark, heavy with the passing of men.

When I came upon the yard it hummed in the heyday of its exuberant youth with a noise which grew in spite of the fact that it seemed it could not grow. Newcastle in the throes of a world war throbs as do the waves upon the iron cliffs which screen her from the sea, and has no ghost of the Merrie England

of our fathers. It is stern. It moves as the Clyde moves, with the irresistible swing of an immense and unyielding power. It gives off something of the attitude of Cromwell's Ironsides, something of the solemnity of the Covenanter. It is cold to all other workers, uncertain whether they mean well or ill—until it has proved them. In five years, perhaps, it will have decided this, and in either case you will be quite certain of its view.

Newcastle, when I left it, had the lid on. A thin drizzle conspired to make the grey town greyer. Trams charged clanging bells through a city which seemed not to have slept all night. Thousands were afoot hurrying one way or another to workshops which now are national. The crowds of clay-daubed men who had dug and sliced to level the Armstrong yard were now red-brown and of a trade which did no navvying.

Ten thousand of them were in the shops to-day, on the jetties and on the ships which lined the fore-shore. Women stood to their tasks clad in the weird dress which only war could force upon them, the desire to help their brothers, fathers, husbands, induce them to wear. They leaned over tending machines and tools which seemed to need no guidance, even as the men who worked at kindred benches. It looked so easy, so simple to switch on and off the power which ran above their heads all through the shops. One said, in a heyday of exultation, "A child could do it," so facile is the controlling touch of lever, switch and brake.

Then suddenly one realised the hum as of a thousand looms, looked into the women's eyes, and saw the thing expressed in terms of weariness which no one can recognise without a thrill of pity. Weariness? They appeared to belie it. Consciously they stood

to hide it. Indeed, they smiled as women will when a stranger comes upon them at tasks which are unusual. They seemed to say, with swift discriminating glances, "Another of those newspaper men come to size us up and write about us—cheer-o!" then turned to prove how deftly they could tend the lathes.

Brasses grew round under their hands, burnished, smooth to the touch; steel threw long shavings which were not soft nor pliable, but curled and of a knife-edged keenness; bars took new shapes, patterns became firm, ready for the metal; and through all the shops ran the drone of machinery at high speed, which grew and waned with the shop. In some it was a hum, in others a throb of power, in others a clang and throb and hum blended, upon which impinged the jar of things outside, which volleyed like machine guns letting off drum upon drum for fun.

But it was not fun. It was work. The ceaseless work which comes of modern war. Nation arrayed against nation even to the women whose energies once were given over entirely to the making of lint and bandages. It came from the pneumatic riveters which were perched at the end of snaked tubing, and chattered like Maxims, sometimes on a turret or the sides of a battleship, sometimes high up on frames which presently would roam the seas as patrols, or submarines, or destroyers of a particular breed, lean, long and very swift, the very antithesis of the ice-breaker over there which was their brother.

Ships were building no longer singly, but in groups which should satisfy the ravenous maw of war. Whippets and greyhounds in all stages of completion; under-sea craft and icebreaker; a battleship enjoying the pandemonium of an overhaul more noisy than

all the rest put together. It seemed impossible to believe that this vast turmoil had grown out of that slicing of clay and earth in the early days of war, this precision and concentration of aim, this wonderful adaptation of power, until one passed into the vast offices and rooms, where, hidden away in some degree from the clang of it, you saw the tight-lipped wielders of capital at the benches which were theirs.

These men, like their brothers of the Clyde, Mersey, Sheffield, Barrow, and other centres, do not give you the impression that they are hustlers; yet elsewhere the term would be applied. They convey rather that sense of power which comes of an acquaintance with the means by which power is produced—a sense of aim, a steadiness—and are as keenly interested in a good bit of colour, or a piece of literature which has stood the three-year test, as the omadhaun who created it.

Have you at any time watched the processes by which a gun is made, considered why it is made, or more than casually acknowledged the energy of man when shaping the by-products of force to his ends?

From what cavernous pit the ore is wrenched, whether from our midst or from the mines which lie behind Bilboa and Santander, is immaterial. From the heart of the mountains it comes, from the bowels of the earth where heat and cold have fashioned it, deep in the ages; where for centuries it has lain compressed and slowly hardening through the spewings and gyrations of a planet in the throes of cooling. Water without, fire within, and a war between the twain; fissures appearing as earth and sea roll

together for a fall ; molten streams squeezed from the one to be met by arms of the other ; water which produces explosions, squeezings, groanings . . . So, in a mist of steam and earth sweat, the ore was formed.

Then followed centuries when the land, too weary to struggle longer, slept as to-day a volcano is said to sleep, when for a space it garners energy for a new spring, encourages green things to clothe its sides, trees and flowers to hide its nakedness . . . looks mystical, beautiful, all in a breath ; beckons and persuades until it is clad and is very perfectly an impostor, then breaks out and slays with the hand of a giant all the soft things it has enthralled.

And having rounded off a phase, produced a lake or an island, again the land sleeps.

Then followed centuries during which strange men appeared clambering about the hills. They picked up the knobs they found, and, having enemies, proceeded to stud their clubs with the ore so that they might slay more certainly those who still fought with clubs of wood. Thus only was it possible to weave sagas of Pale Death, sing at the camp fires, strut and appear magnificent in the eyes of their women.

So force was born of force, and for a space clubs sufficed. Then man became civilised, cut away the struts which held him trammelled, denied his gods, harnessed the lightnings, studded the sea with floating castles, laughed at Gethsemane, and busied himself in the pursuit of world-power.

To this end guns were made, and ever greater guns. On the Tyne rose the answer which was to slake that insensate *Deutschland*, *Deutschland über alles* which presently would bring Armageddon to our midst.

It was a lawyer who first gave us the modern

breech-loading gun, even as it was a parson who gave us that chained lightning the Brennan torpedo; a lawyer who became what nature had intended, an engineer, the creator of hydraulic machinery and the founder of Elswick Works—Lord Armstrong. Two names stand very high to-day in Newcastle—they are those of Lord Armstrong and Sir Andrew Noble. To them, more than to others, may be attributed the persistence and long vision which has provided us with the vast engineering plant and industries of the Tyne—the shipbuilding and the ramifications of a co-ordinated industry which, with its allied centres in the Midlands, the North and West, is helping us in our struggle for humanity.

They appear to have used their opportunities with skill and foresight, and, by the application of breech-loading mechanism, to be the fathers of all those vast weapons which now do duty on the various fronts.

It was here, too, they built ships and planned the defensive armour which was to circumvent the piercing quality of the guns they forged; here, in a long-drawn fight of guns and armament, that British sea-power was upheld. The cost of it was heavy, but less ruinous than war; the knowledge that it was essential a standing sop to those who urged disarming.

They had their critics, their traducers—those who cried out that wars were made by the armament firms in order to test their handiwork. But the nation which, in a half-hearted way and by its inaction, acknowledged these witticisms would have done well to accept the burden without whimpering—to have prepared even greater armaments, looking upon them merely as an assurance against national peril. It would have done well had it listened in later years to our heroic chief Lord Roberts and got itself honestly

prepared against the war which now has swept us with half the world into the madness which is desolating Europe. It would have done well to duck those prophets who prated of the intimidation of preparation, and so left the Navy free to act when action became inevitable.

CHAPTER III

THE LADDER

Alma Mater—From Midshipman to Admiral of the Fleet.

THE Navy has been described as a fine machine for taking all the originality out of a man ; but the quip is no more applicable to the Navy than it is to Sandhurst, Eton, Rugby, or any other great public school.

To be quite honest, there is very little originality in the average man to-day ; in a boy there is less. To be quite free of all ambiguity, there is very little doubt but that the majority of boys and men are fools. Now the only way to guard against the action of fools is to make the machine they tend fool-proof. To that end we have discipline, which is, perhaps, the greatest safeguard against the foolishness of fools man can supply.

The only alternative to this would seem to be the recasting of humanity ; in other words, we should have to begin again, dig deep in the strata and plan, so that in future instead of copyists we should produce originals, instead of mere echoes a multitude of voices. Now that would take time, and it would be very disconcerting. It might be essential to begin in the Garden of Eden . . . and the site of that cradle is a swamp.

For these reasons, if not for others, it has seemed wise for those who administer the Navy and our public schools to take mankind as they find it. They

prepare, therefore, certain troughs and mangers at which the youth of the nation may browse, and they supplement the scheme with a thing called discipline. From time to time, too, they multiply the troughs. How far the browsing should be pushed and fostered, whether sugar and jam should be introduced to make the mess still more palatable, or the appetite alone should provide the essential desire to cram, whether additional troughs are necessary is one matter ; but without the abiding grace of discipline the human atom would be of small value to the manicured and complex world we find to-day on the hither side of Fiddlers' Green.

Even in that stirring and individualistic period known as the hundred years war but one Nelson and one Wellington appeared. There were others, of course, but none who were competent to mould either Navy or Army and persuade the nation to bear the shock of victory. Collingwood, Troubridge, Howe, St. Vincent were there, but only one Nelson ; Picton, Byng, Ponsonby, Maitland, but only one Iron Duke. How much less, then, is it possible now to produce genius ?

I confess to a certain prejudice in favour of what is known as slacking. Some develop early ; others late. I think the effort to force boys through an extremely difficult course in a given time is a mistake. I take it we are not all mentally competent to absorb, even by rote, so large a dose of knowledge as appears to be necessary at Osborne—if you are to qualify for Dartmouth two years later. Here is the list. I confess it left me breathless :—

Mathematics, with Geometrical Drawing ; Physics ; Chemistry ; Mechanics ; Applied Mechanics ; Laboratory Work ; Engineering. Workshop Practice ; Mechanical Drawing ; Seamanship ; Gunnery ; Navi-

gation ; French or German ; English Grammar and Composition ; English Literature ; History ; Naval History ; Geography ; Bible Study. Add to this drill and physical training, time for games, meals and recreation, and I think it will be admitted that the cadets at Osborne earn their rations.

A blazing day lay over the island, cloudless, sparkling, still. The woods which fringe the yachting ground of England were standing spiked and motionless against the haze.

It was June ; but no yachts appeared either on the Solent or on Southampton Water. Instead, a few rusty mine-sweepers, a tramp or two, and a destroyer lay in Cowes Roads. Farther out, where the great waterways meet, a greyhound of the Atlantic leaned somnolent upon the tide. It was *Aquitania*, wearing the white dress of the Hospital Service, the broad green riband and red crosses which marked her as non-belligerent ; yet she no longer passed between France and England on her errand of mercy.

The Hohenzollern and those maritime fencers of Bremen who had interests in common had decreed that she, with other hospital-ships, was fair game for U-boat marksmen. They were obsessed by the necessity of providing spectacular events for the German nation, and Hamburg had no mind to find mammoth British liners still upon the sea to challenge Germany when peace came. Therefore *Aquitania* lay idle upon Southampton Water, swinging to the tide.

Nor were yachtsmen to be seen in the streets of Cowes, the winding old-world street which usually

is full of them. Young men wearing badges of exemption were plainly visible. They walked strung out across the roads and pavements, chaffing, smoking cigarettes, indulging in horse-play; but the yachtsmen, it appeared, were at work—*pace* Mr. Smillie and all those who rave of inequality of service to-day.

The Medina, shimmering in a heat wave of unusual intensity, provided the first touch of war discoverable so far since leaving the mainland. Pneumatic riveters chattered on plates which looked hot as the rivets. Steering machines, bending, rolling, jobbling machines added their quota to the general din, and again one looked for yachts in this home of theirs and found them gone. The breath of the great war had driven them afield with their owners, the yachtsmen, taken them out into North Sea and Mediterranean, while East Cowes had reverted to the work which makes for "barbarism" and was a miniature Glasgow in full swing. Only the heat remained, the badged young men, the wondrous blues and greens of the Channels; the old time town we had left, drowsing away the hours which yet must pass ere peace is declared.

Elsewhere a raid was in progress. Bombs were falling upon London roofs from Gothas which looked like silver gnats against the sky. In the still serenity of that day streets were emptying, windows were being blown in, and here and there a direct hit was registered on some small home of the people to provide for were-wolf pæans and a flag-fluttering, off-day in Berlin.

Osborne, when I reached it, knew nothing of these things. It moved in another world, and in a moment I moved with it.

Between three and four hundred boys were in the playing-fields and its approaches, engaged in one of the pastimes by the practice of which we are

said to have won the battle of Waterloo. Here it looked like a battle of flowers. All those boys clad in flannels silhouetted against the green. Fourteen matches were being played off directly under my eye. Three to four hundred boys all working like slaves to win a game played with sticks and a ball. It was kaleidoscopic—dazzling. It was Homeric, too, in that sun. It made one hot to watch them. Boys were there who scampered and cheered; boys who cut and drove as A. G. Steel once could; boys who had the trick of standing as W. G. once stood, toe raised, bat raised, ready to smite; boys who had not quite mastered the trick of elbows up, and some who looked like Spofforths, some who looked like Waddington in the West; others who sent down curly ones—even as in the fields of men.

Sharp, staccato cries rose from amidst that crowd. From time to time a cheer rang out, a batsman marched back unbuttoning his gloves, very alert to break into a run just when the cheers became disconcerting, aware that he had scored. Others who made great haste to reach the pavilion, to get a sweater and hide behind its folds, aware of the thing we call a “duck.”

A very human crowd, my masters, developing muscle, alertness, character, even as on the playing-fields of Eton, Rugby, Winchester, learning to give and take and quite unharassed by the noise of guns which boomed out there in France with a low muttering menace that shook the hills in the nearer counties.

In some inexplicable fashion the scene reminded me of other fields—of a land brown and sun-scorched, hedged on the east by Cordillera, on the west by the Pacific, where boys never play and men are wholly occupied in gathering sufficient gold to escape it, coming down to its townlets, spending their money

in riotous living and returning again to pile up gold : a dun land of reds and yellows and browns, of rock and sand and spewed-up igneous strata where no vegetation grows and the foothills resound to the roar of a surf which is never still. A land of richness and sterility, of trackless distance where snake and scorpion thrive amid the stones, where the earthquakes often, and I pray no cadet from Osborne may go.

The orderly who accompanied me and waited while I sat had spoken of the *Good Hope* and *Monmouth*—I scarcely know why—and of Coronel, Lota, and the island which lies beyond. Perhaps that set my memory delving, for I saw the dim shadows of that mountain barrier which hedged von Spee and in the offing showed the silhouetted shapes which belched fire and steel upon an enemy they could not see. On the one hand the eternal sea, a gale tearing it ; on the other the shadowed breakers thrown back upon the eternal ranges, the hills veiled, retiring before advancing night amidst the roar of wind and guns.

Then eight bells sounded, and I glanced up, perhaps to look for the watch which should muster, and saw instead the playing-fields, the radiant light, the boys who struggled still with bats and balls preparing for the game of life which thunders as we watch the ebb and flow of battles.

The bell stood near, some old ship's bell, poised nicely on gimbals. Above it was a mast with rigging, an ensign hanging, still, the twin-wheels which once steered a man-o'-war. There, too, at the edge of the green a lifeboat stood incongruous on stocks, and the mast threw shadow lines across it, lines delicate as a spider's web.

Eight bells—the signal at which a watch is called,

when hoarse voices shout "Tumble up, there!" "Show a leg!" and a drowsy crowd of men and boys moves aft to meet a watch quite ready to drowse.

The bell at Osborne shines and is very still on its perch. The mast which towers above it is white and tapering, the rigging in splendid order, the ratlines taut. There is a net spread to catch those who climb and may fall. The truck towers high overhead and shines like the bell. The white ensign floats proudly lazy against sheltering trees and bungalows; but out there where one day the boys will go the bell is often curtained in spray, often waist deep in seas which roll upon it out of a horizon bleak and threatening disaster. The rigging is scantier, there are no nets to catch those who trip, the truck draws arcs across the sky and beneath it often is a tripod thing like the legs of the floating crane which lifts the ship's great guns and boilers. Up one of these legs is a steel-railed ladder by which men reach the fighting-top. Only the ensign is the same. That droops and flutters, or stands out, stark against the sky, precisely as at Osborne. The same flag, the same symbol of Faith and Truth and Quality as that before which, as boys, you stood at the salute when it rose beside your playing-fields to kiss the breeze.

And with eight bells came an officer and a proffered cup of tea. I rose and took him at his word, and when next I looked upon the fields the boys had vanished and were ensconced in *Collingwood* at tea.

Collingwood, named after the famous Admiral and friend of Nelson, is, you will gather, the College mess, and here in the long rectangular room some 530 cadets were seated. Tea is the last meal of the day, and is what a sailor would describe as a good, square meal. I saw none who appeared unable to enjoy it. After

tea came half an hour devoted to "study," then half an hour given over to "recreation," then "prayers," and at 8.30 "retire."

Close upon that the commander goes his rounds, the bugle sounds "lights out," and the Nelsons of the future are at rest after a day which has been passed, as the German Staff would say, "according to plan." To one who is not of the German War Staff, nor of the College staff, it seemed rather over-planned. From *réveillé*, when the boys turn out at seven o'clock, rush through the plunge-bath, a sort of follow-my-leader, helter-skelter of naked infantry, and double back, dry, scrub teeth, dress, wriggle into jackets, say prayers and stand ready for the "advance," is thirty minutes, and from that moment until "lights out" every second has been accounted for. It seems rather like water-tight compartments to one accustomed less to rule than to be ruled by opportunism, but on the other hand the result cannot be overlooked.

I confess, however, to a predilection for rather less plan with boys so young as these at Osborne—to rather less of what I can only term strenuousness in the curriculum. I confess, too, I liked better to watch them winning runs for their side than on those days when I passed through classrooms and laboratories, hot and airless under the blue sky, to see them win marks; yet, in spite of these criticisms, had I my life to begin again, I could pray for no greater happiness than to start at Osborne.

If Osborne be the cradle of the British naval officer, then is Dartmouth the concomitant nursery—the additional space which follows when feet have learned

the trick of balance. But to reach it is not easy. Some fall by the way, as in other spheres. So, too, when one emerges from Dartmouth to take his place in the training cruiser all is not easy. It is complex. Even now he may fall, as indeed he may any day all through his life of service. But the environment is fine, the atmosphere all that a boy may need if he is to win the coveted white patch which constitutes him at once an officer and, that curious sobriquet, a snotty.

His life hitherto has been one of never-ending enthusiasms, friendships, and stirring interest. He has hobnobbed with his peers, perhaps with the son of his King. Always before him have been enkindling trophies and the deeds of our heroic dead. Always the old customs, shibboleths if you will, the old nomenclature. Thus the officers' rooms become cabins, the recreation-hall the quarter-deck, the gunrooms and dormitories all named individually, as at Osborne, after the admirals and navigators who, more than any others, made Great Britain greater, searched out countries which to-day rank as Dominions, and enabled us to fight a world-war in company of our brothers from over-seas.

I have yet to meet the naval officer who has a harsh word either for Osborne or Dartmouth. Most of them love the old life of the colleges, the memories fostered by their terms, terms which remain theirs through the years, as those who have faith in astrology cling to the star whose influence is upon their lives. Drake, Blake, Hawke, Nelson, Collingwood, Benbow, Duncan are some of the honoured names that face daily and hourly the plastic minds of those who presently will be called upon to carry out the will of our Sovereign Lord the King. The atmosphere of Marryat is upon the boys as they work and play

within these classic halls. "Peter Simple," "Midshipman Easy" are their friends; they are acquainted with the ships in which they served, frigates they know were the eyes of the Fleet, precisely as to-day cruisers and scouts are the vessels which go out before the slower battleships and find the weight of opposing squadrons. The two-decker and three-decker have a certain fascination even in these days of steam and turbine. The stay of their masts, the hang of their sails, the sit of the towering hull as the ship glides to her anchorage, all are beautiful and in the highest sense uplifting to those who love the sea, the smell of tar, and the stately passage of a vessel under sail.

We do well to encourage tradition; we do well to encourage hero-worship—for, to put it at its least influence, these are the factors that man our Navy for us, make it safe for us to sleep peacefully in our beds at night and permit us to forget with a whole-souled blindness that either ships or sailors are of our cosmos.

We do lip service occasionally to these men as we did in Nelson's day, but think of them as strange, amorphous beings whose modes are not ours. We cheer to the echo when we are asked to help save the souls of this queer tribe, and forget that they have bodies as well as souls—that in a world of competition it is necessary to keep them clothed as well as saved.

Nor do I think it is understood that these officers who order events in "scraps" and fleet actions which pin the Germans back behind their mine-fields are not all endowed with the wealth of Cræsus. Many of them live on their pay—which is microscopic. A lieutenant must discharge his mess bill, his wine bill, and meet his share in the entertainment

of guests, find himself in the costly uniforms and equipage of his calling. He must do it, too, on 11s. a day. And he may be married. After four years' service his pay leaps to 12s.—£219 a year.

Not much change there to rattle. One has heard of artisans who earn more and still pay no income tax. But the lieutenant who fights our battles for us rarely considers these factors. He has his traditions. Beyond his two stripes are three and four; beyond that again is the broad band of an admiral with other bands above it. There was a day when Nelson was lieutenant, but he died C. in C. of the Mediterranean Fleet and died a man. I would add to the beatitudes one to cover tradition, hero-worship, whatsoever you will of unpracticality, so that it covered the headiness which carries men smiling to their ultimate heaven.

Joss, you know, is a great power at sea even in the days of mammoth battleships. The lower deck calls it luck, sometimes with an adjective prefix; the ward-room and gunroom speak of Joss.

The commander of a certain Dreadnought as we came back from battle practice in the North Sea put it in this way—Joss evidently in a balancing mood:—

“I came out of the *Twirler*, shall we say, at the beginning of 1915, just when things were shaping for liveliness. They gave me the other half-stripe and presently I came here. She was building then. I helped to get a bit more head-room for the mat’loes on the lower deck. I would like to put some of those draftsmen down there for a month and then examine them for dyspepsia, curvature and the sins of their

fathers. It would have results!" (He was wandering, but so were we. He slashed an unoffending fist.) "They call that Joss. But it isn't. It's stupidity. They seem to consider that the mat'loes glide about on their bellies like snakes; but they don't . . . and it isn't Joss when they have to. It's draftsmen . . . some people call them designers—well, it depends on how you read that term. But take my word for it, it isn't Joss."

I looked into the grey mist which hemmed us so that our next astern was a shadowy wraith with a white moustache moving in our wake.

"But it was Joss when I got promotion and came out of the *Twirler*," he added and paused.

"How?" I questioned.

"Well—she went out and three days later touched a mine and went up. Only two came in from her and the commander was not one of them."

"If it was Joss for you," I said at this, "it was not for him."

He halted and stared into the driving mist.

"Who knows?" he asked. "It is a clean death. One may do worse than die in the defence of one's country. It may have been his relief—end of the watch, you know. Somebody controls these things . . . not a sparrow falleth to the ground but our Father Who is in Heaven seeth it." (He looked at me, grave eyes beneath the oak-leaf gold of his peak.) "I like to think there is something behind, some force somewhere which regulates events, don't you? It was not my turn—it was his; and he was a good boy."

Then with a swift twinkle he went on: "But this is Joss, if you like. It happened long ago—before the war, when I was stationed at Gib. You remember when that P. & O. got ashore on the Morocco coast

with the Duke [of Fife on board]? Well, I was in one of the ships that raced out to do lifeboat work, and had the luck to be one of the first two to pick up the wreck. We were going all out, you may be sure, a beast of a sea running, and I saw myself mentioned in dispatches for having saved some of the Royal party at the very least . . . for I was the leading boat, you see. It might have meant anything to me . . . anything under the sun—but it didn't."

"Why?" I questioned, seeing he paused.

"That's where Joss comes in," he tossed out. "Something happened to my boat, so No. 2 cut in and took my place before I could make up lost ground. There was an admiral in her stern sheets too, and of course it was his day."

"Hard luck," I suggested, not quite sure which term to use.

"Rather. But he was a good sort . . . saw he had wiped my eye and sent to tell me to call on him. I went, you may be sure. . . . He had the Nelson trick of sympathy, which means so much to a junior . . ."

The commander sucked at his pipe; I sucked at mine. It seemed absurd to say anything when obviously he held all the trumps. "He was a good sort," he reiterated, "and would have done the square thing for me. He said he had botched my hand, that the kudos ought to be mine as I had been the man to spot the wreck. He said he would put the matter right for me when he reached home . . . it would be a great thing for a young officer to get in touch with the Duke; but for him—'an old fogey' he called himself—nothing mattered. He would do his best to see I got the pull. . . ."

And here again my friend became engrossed with

his pipe. I refused to let him off. "Jove!" I said, "he was a white man. Well—what happened?"

He still fumbled with his pipe; but he answered:

"That's where Joss comes in. He started for home; but he didn't fetch—— You see—er—as a matter of fact he pegged out on his way up Channel."

But there is no Joss about promotion. That comes of seniority alone.

Under the existing regulation, known as Fisher's Scheme, all officers pass through Osborne and Dartmouth on a common footing as cadets. They work in the same classes, whether for navigation and general education or at the bench in the engineering workshops. This system is continued, too, when at the end of four years they go to sea in the training cruiser. Indeed, it is not until the cadet has become a lieutenant that he must choose which branch of the Service is to be his.

Then he must specialise either in navigation, gunnery, or torpedo, in submarine or R.N.A.S.; in destroyers, physical training, engineering, or remain a General Service lieutenant. Perhaps 60 per cent. decide to specialise, and of them a certain number become ultra-specialists and are known as dagger-men from the symbol which is placed against their names.

It is at this stage, under the scheme, that the executive officer breaks away from the rest. He becomes a specialist, perhaps a dagger-man, reaches commander's rank as a specialist, and from thence passes by seniority to captain and finally to admiral.

As commander an officer has full control of the work of his ship. It is he who must carry into effect

all orders issued by his captain. He must arrange for landing parties, boating, and the order of the day. It is he who is responsible for the smooth process of coaling ship, sending for stores, cleaning and painting ship. Stowage of boats, mooring and unmooring, entertainments, and a thousand concomitant burdens are on his shoulders day and night for the whole period his ship is in commission.

He is the senior officer of the wardroom mess, wears three full stripes with a curl, to denote the military branch, above it. He is president of the mess, the officer who calls upon "Mr. Vice" when he proposes the health of the King. He is a martinet, very sure of himself and of his powers, a man among men, the father of those who are his juniors or are in trouble, and their uncompromising critic when criticism is essential. He is also their companion at those smoke-room sing-songs which help to break the monotony of life at sea.

To come from the activities and companionship of this rank to the seclusion and dignity of a captain must be one of the greatest drawbacks to promotion. Hitherto since he came afloat he has been the comrade and latterly the councillor of the gunroom and wardroom; but when he wears four stripes instead of three he surrenders all that—lives in larger cabins, eats his meals and lives his life alone.

In harbour he has his compensations, his friends, and his consultative chats with the admiral; for the rest he has moved from the position of one whose business it is so to dovetail events that one does not impinge upon the other. He has become the organiser and plotter of evolutions which others must carry out. He has become the brain of his ship, and although occasionally he visits the wardroom, listens to a song, chats, or glances through an illus-

trated paper and smokes as the others do, he has an air of reserve, one might call it preoccupation, which is rarely seen in the faces of his officers.

There is no formality in these visits. The officers "carry on" precisely as if he were in his cabin. There is none of that offensive servility between juniors and seniors that one finds elsewhere. They take their stand as men do who have had a common education, who know how to acknowledge seniority, either of age or rank, without confusion. A middy will chaff with you and give you points in *riposte*, but he will not kow-tow either to your age or to your rank, although he will acknowledge both. Indeed, I have met young officers in all branches of the Service who could lord it quite serenely as host, even on a pinch, as president of their mess, and remain as calmly expert as a society woman at that ordeal we term an "at home." I know no higher praise.

It seems, then, that when a commander comes away from all this and is invested with the isolation of a command which no longer has tangible aids, he must suffer in the Navy even more than when he gets a similar step in the Merchant Service. It is at this stage that the habits formed by tradition and long service are resolved and a man's character is made plain. If you have character, nothing very much matters. If you have none and happen on the rank of captain or admiral, you were better dead.

Villeneuve, Admiral of France, opponent of Nelson, seems to have been such a man. On his escape from the blockading squadron off Toulon he reached the West Indies and could have wrecked us there; but although he was "three weeks in the West Indies before Nelson arrived, in that time he neither accomplished nor undertook anything but the recapture

of Diamond Rock, a precipitous islet off the south end of Martinique, which the British had held for some time." *

Sir Robert Calder seems to have been a British replica of similar weight. Faced with the chance for which Nelson had waited two years and twice crossed the Atlantic, he managed in a futile way to meet, fight, and lose Villeneuve when by all the tenets it was essential not only to beat him, but never to lose touch.

The French admiral was bound to a rendezvous to form a junction with the Spanish fleet. It was part of the plan which Napoleon had formed when engaged upon the Boulogne adventure. The possibility of invasion and the proximity of the Corsican had together so bemused the people of these islands that nothing but a fight in which we were clearly the victor could hearten the nation or minimise the risk of invasion. Yet Calder allowed the Frenchman to get away to his rendezvous at a moment when Nelson with fewer ships was eating his heart out to be at him.

If character, then, is a quality essential in a captain, it is even more necessary in the rank which is above it. A captain commands one ship, a rear-admiral a squadron. A captain takes his orders from the flagship, but a vice-admiral and an admiral command a fleet—that is to say, a combination of squadrons with all the scouts, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines which go to make each unit.

A captain, you understand, still has some one to whom he looks for orders and advice, but an admiral has none. He acts on his own initiative. He must verify or discard the crumbs which daily and hourly are flung to him. He must sift men's words, analyse

* Mahan, "Life of Nelson," vol. ii., p. 298.

motives, search through blank walls for signs of design. Rumour is his handmaiden; but he dare not trust her. Truth remains hidden in her well, dexterous in evasion'as men with a conscience. He may rarely move on the spur of the moment, because without co-ordination his plan may miscarry. He must be ready to spring and equally ready to lie down. He must be that strange thing in man, a mixture of audacity and caution.

Few can attain these heights; fewer hold them when attained. As it is more difficult to breathe the higher you mount, so it is the more difficult to see the farther you remove from the crowd. For a man's progress in these days of wireless messages is not unhampered by the fact that he is linked to Whitehall. Whitehall, too, is made fussy by jangle which is not of sailors; by questions in the House; by rulers who are at sea, alike in their office and their metaphors. It all comes of the demand to know, offhand, what has been done, what is being done, what is going to be done by an island nation which for years refused to prepare for the day which has come.

Nelson moved alone and could eat his heart out over the silence with which he was surrounded. For weeks he would be without news of Whitehall, for weeks be entirely reliant on what one of his too few frigates could glean; but an admiral of to-day is in no danger of that. Rather is he like to be confused by the multiplicity of voices all quacking in different keys; by the buzzing wires, the wireless interludes, the signals made, even as of old, by the man who knows nothing of signals, questions asked by men whose object is so hid that one is compelled to consider whether it be a matter of national importance or a pushing of the personal equation, individual-cum-party aims.

One hears too much of the push and prise of men who are behind the scenes in this war—men who are powerful, whom it is wise not to offend. One would like to hear less of it; more of restraint; a finer recognition of the integrity and calm resolve of those who are in touch with events—who are not likely to burk the issue nor to scamper like frightened ducks before the wild beasts of the sea sent by the *Reise Kaiser*.

At the head of them all is the admiral, a man who once was on the *Britannia* and has trod the long path which brings him finally to command.

Sometimes his place is on the flagship, sometimes in a rather bare room before a desk littered with papers, the walls which hem him from the world hung with charts and plans crossed by squares of red and blue ink and minute squadrons at work upon them. Here are the shoals and lightships, the tracks and distances, the depths of water and height of land. Here the mine-fields, there the roads by which it is possible to cross them, there the blocked enemy strongholds, enemy aerodromes, submarine centres, and the misty backwaters of the Frisian Islands.

One sees the narrowing Channel which leads to Dover Straits, a little circle which gives to scale the arc of visibility on a dark, clear night—the arc, that is to say, within which it is possible to discover an unlighted craft at night. It is very small, less than a mile in diameter; but on hazy nights, or in rain, fog or falling snow, the arc becomes microscopic. You see a vessel only when you are nearly in contact with her, when only by the exercise of your skill as a seaman is it possible to avoid collision.

Remember, too, that vessels brought suddenly in contact with each other are travelling often at the speed of trains; that the raider comes hell for leather,

perhaps at forty miles an hour, knows the exact position and number of his squadron, while the defender must first discover who it is that approaches and must hold fire until he knows.

All odds are with the raider flotillas, precisely as all odds are with the raiders by air. Now and again it is possible to sight them and make sure, as was the case in the magnificent action of the *Broke* and *Swift*; but it is not always wise to turn and ram, or open fire on the hazy semblance of a squadron, as Rodjesvensky learned in the early days of that cruise *à outrance* which ended at Tushimo.

The enemy bent on a raid, on an evolution, on what you will of an offensive, knows what is his objective; the defence can only guess. Nelson after two weary years of promenading up and down before Toulon waiting for the French fleet under Latouche-Treville to come out, was unable to catch him in the act. Word came to him that the fleet had sailed, but not whither. Nelson beat up and down in vain attempts to find that fleet, sailed for Egypt, searched the Eastern Mediterranean, came back, looked in at Gibraltar, and finally discovered that weeks ago Treville has passed out of the straits, bound, as Nelson surmised—still guess-work, you perceive—to the West Indies.

So with an admiral of the blockading squadrons to-day. He must guess. The only difference is that he is in touch with a plethora of opinions, suppositions, and must sit at his desk or march the deck of his flagship while making coherence of them.

In Nelson's day the fleets he commanded were usually short of frigates, the fast vessels on which he relied to bring him news. On the outbreak of war between England and Germany the battle fleets were short of cruisers and destroyers.

"I want thirty destroyers," said an admiral to me not long ago, "strung out in line to guard that passage; but I haven't got them. In addition I should require vessels to relieve them and vessels to replace those which are damaged; I have neither."

That is a matter for the delectation of the nation and its rulers; yet, had the Navy been given a free hand at the beginning of the war, the war would have ended in two years. It had not that free hand. The blockade was a farce from the beginning, the Navy unable to move as it would.

A little while ago a general is said to have remarked that "he hoped the Army would win the war before the Navy succeeded in losing it."

That is a quip, and quips neither win nor lose wars. They are part of the equipment of the three P's, and should not be repeated broadcast for ignorance to batten upon.

If the Army had held the Belgian coast instead of marching south to aid the French, the Germans would not have been able to dig themselves in, as the saying goes. Nor would the Navy have been offered the silly task of digging them out. That was a mistake—perhaps unpreventable with the force at our disposal—of the Army. The Army should remember it when it rails at the impossible conditions it, in common with the nation, created for the Navy.

CHAPTER IV

HIS MAJESTY'S BLUEJACKETS

Sailors in the Making.—The Lower Deck.—The Gun Turret.

“ A SAILOR is a person who sails in, or navigates, a ship ; if that does not cover it, you may call him a seaman.”

That is the definition supplied by those who administer through the medium of a dictionary the boiled-down knowledge of ages in an age when sail has nearly vanished from the seas.

In the Navy the man is known as a “ bluejacket ” by those who march with prunes and prism for guide, as a “ mat’loe ” or “ flat-foot ” if you take his own version, as the “ handyman ” if you are inclined to give him his due. But if you were to ask him to sail the leviathan whose quarterdeck he salutes, or to tell you something of navigation, he would reply in the fashion of all those who scent sarcasm : “ Garn ! Oo are you gettin’ at ? ” And if you persisted and proved yourself worthy his confidence, he might add : “ Twenty-five knots is about our mark, an’ w’en we navigate we do it so as to cop Fritz w’en ee’s off the spot,” which is not precisely what he means to infer.

As a matter of fact it is very difficult to get behind the screen which sailors erect when in contact with tweeds and broadcloth. He is not quite certain of your attitude. He has been accustomed to your frowns rather than to your smiles. You belong in

consequence to a tribe who are "sharks" or "shore-loafers," he is not sure which, persons who know nothing of ships and care less.

The popular feeling in pre-war days, to our disgrace be it said, was that we preferred to avoid him. If he came into a railway carriage where we were, we hastened to find another. If he entered a bar where we were enjoying our whisky peg, he was invited to go the other side of the screen or outside. We refused in the smug days of peace and plenty to rub shoulders with uniform when by any chance we could avoid it. Sailors were people who had not the common sense to stay on dry land. Dr. Johnson's opinion of sailors is well known. We seem to have accepted it together with Voltaire's quip about "murderers in red clothes and hats two feet high" at a gulp. And in later days the bluejacket was the "common sailor" of educated diction, even as his brother was the "common soldier."

But now, when all men worthy the name who have youth on their side are either sailors or soldiers, we have discovered a new and rather urgent kinship for uniform, and have ventured sometimes to sing its praise in the blatant fashion of our day. "Our boys," we hear them called, "our boys in blue" or "in khaki," which is simple offence become compound. To the plain man this savours somewhat of death-bed repentance, of your joy at seeing a policeman when an enemy has you by the throat.

The sailor scents patronage in these effusions. He is not looking for endearments because he stood up to Fritz when Fritz was cornered and compelled to take a hammering. He is concerned for his pal, his "raggie," as before, knows what is due to the white ensign that floats over him, and would like to see Fritz come out to take the dressing he has earned,

even as Villeneuve came out of Toulon to face Nelson and Trafalgar.

We know so little of him that he is nearly as strange to us as in those days when he was haled to the Fleet by means of the press gang. We understand him, indeed, no better than we understood his brother of the First Seven Divisions, whom at length we have admitted to the temple while barring the door on the Navy.

Why these things are is a mystery which some day the historian will explain in more or less lucid phrasing. He may perhaps enlighten us, too, on our attitude to sailors generally, whether of the Navy or of the Merchant Service; why we hold aloof from them, speak of them in inverted commas, as it were, and seem so curiously to forget, in time of peace, that without them we could not exist as a nation, free or controlled.

Yet he is worth knowing.

He is the man who runs barefoot on a battleship's deck, works her guns, mans a pinnacle and goes out under shell fire to pick up enemies who otherwise would drown; who paints, polishes, scrubs, growls and moves to action stations without quaking. Whom sometimes we see on the parade with a girl on his arm, or hurrying with a fat black bag to entrain for his base. He smokes a fag in these days instead of a pipe; but his eyes are steady in spite of the mines and submarines which for long months are the sole representatives of that enemy he awaits, and in spite of the tears in the eyes of those who accompany him and must say good-bye.

He has a great reverence for women, notwithstanding the lessons women through the ages have taught him. He is, perhaps, a little self-conscious; but he loves kiddies as he loves dogs, or Port Said

donkeys, horses, anything he can pet. He swears by a certain grey African parrot he has trained to be uncannily wise, or by the marmoset he picked up during his last commission in the East, and he spends hours perfecting its tricks that it may be well loved by the girl for whom it is destined.

He is particular about his rig, as he calls it. His trousers must have the correct degree of buttock tightness, the prescribed flow over his instep. His collar must be just so deep, his black silk handkerchief knotted as it has been knotted since Nelson joined his brothers in Valhalla. But the old reefer has gone the way of the queue, and in its place is a semi-military garment more in keeping with the needs of the day, less trim though, less characteristic of the sailor than any part of his outfit.

He endures buffets with a stoicism that leaves the rest of us staring, hears orders which may put him in touch with the red flame of battle, and obeys as he obeyed his instructors at Chatham, Shotley, Portsmouth, or any of those centres which milled him as a boy. The secret of his endurance, his wonderful adaptability, is that he was caught young, as we say, and taken into the Navy at that difficult hour when the school board had released him as finished. Just then he was ripe for adventure in any known field—ripe for heroism or stupidity; ripe for apprenticeship to some struggling tradesman who would set him on a cycle too high for his reach, load him and strain him, work him till the soul was dead in him . . . ; or, by chance, ripe to stagnate as a caddie on Merrie England's green links.

Instead, or perhaps after an interval given over to these adventures, a training ship or a naval establishment got hold of him. At Shotley and Whale Island you may see him to-day keen at his new job



BLUEJACKETS IN THE MAKING.



SIGNAL DRILL.

and learning bit by bit, fact by fact, the formulæ of battle. You will find him smart, not slouching, keen, not bored, alert on the drill-ground, working hard on his playing-fields ; his eyes set on the lessons he is learning of what men can do, of what John Travers Cornwall did, and blind to the pittance which will be his as a seaman. You will see him double as he moves from classroom to classroom, double when he is sent on a message, double in company formation when he goes to his messroom ; and, if you are interested or something of a psychologist, you can march round the tables and read what you will of his attitude towards dinner or tea, or, obliquely, towards his messmates and matee.

I would not have you take it for granted that the system is *sans peur et sans reproche*, except in comparison with the system he has escaped. There are drawbacks to camp life, to barrack life, training-ship life ; but if you set either of them against the heart-break and the Pentecostal iniquity of great towns, whence largely he is enlisted, the Establishments have it without a dissentient voice.

There is another view of him which shows his versatility and the new atmosphere which surrounds him when off duty. Chance put me in touch with it on a scorching Sunday afternoon at Southsea. It was too hot to walk or to do anything but lounge. So I entered the turnstile, found a seat in the Concert-hall and sat. A song was in progress, and the singer discanting on "The Garden of Roses," or something akin to it, in a quavery, wiggle-waggle voice which troubled me. The lady was dressed for a ball and wore a zouave which an enemy had designed ; but she gained an encore because of the power of the final high note and because the audience demanded it. So she came on again, wavered through something

new—perhaps of the man among the roses, or the thorn—wavered to the end, wavered flat, and vanished. She might have been discanting on the rules of prosody.

To inspire hope the orchestra gave us "Tales of Hoffman" and a 'cello solo with harp accompaniment which the hall decided to praise without stint. And then there appeared on the platform a bluejacket with a song "Nirvana," which brought down the house, and I confess to a thrill. It was very spontaneous. There were no shakes, no frills, only a fine voice, perfect enunciation and, what is unusual, soul.

I rubbed my eyes. Who was it? I had never heard of him. He stood there, just a bluejacket without an atom of self-consciousness, accepting the plaudits for a love-song perfectly rendered. The house roared applause. It refused to acknowledge the orchestra or its leader. The bluejacket returned twice, each time with a fresh song, and each time the audience refused to listen to others. It had ears for this sailor alone. Again he came back. He did not seem flustered, but stood square to the hall while the khaki-clad accompanist struck the first chord of "Because."

A veritable cry ran through the audience. I never heard anything like it. It was nearly a sob, and there before us was our bluejacket at ease as on the lower deck. No shifting of feet, no question of where to put his hands, no hesitation about where to come in. He was there to sing and he sang. Every word told, there was no gesture, no working up of effect, just simplicity, and behind it the soul of the singer. You know how the song goes, the aspiration of it, the continuity, and can guess the effect on an audience already strung taut. It was immense. Magnetic is the word, yet the singer had no frills.

That, no doubt, was an exceptional case. It seemed difficult to remember that this lad—he looked little more—was on service, risking his life that we may live—perhaps a leading torpedo-man or cook of the mess. The hall seemed to know him ; but that he was able to touch sailors and soldiers was equally plain ; that sentiment has it, hands down, with your bluejackets, more than ever established.

Portsmouth exuded sailors at every pore during the hot days of my visit. In the main street, which was thronged on path and roadway, on the Hard, on the piers, the cars, the slums, the stewpans of a too crowded warren, on the ferries, on the cobbles of the great dockyard—everywhere were the sailors and their kin. I think there must be a greater number of sailors to the acre in Portsmouth and its environs than in any other seaport of Great Britain, and, for their sakes and the sake of their brothers in khaki, I should like to sweep the whole town out from behind the Hard into the sea (leaving only the barracks and parks), bring back the cleansed material, and set it up on a new plan. I should like to choose my plan, and would give preference to the one which would provide light and air and some modicum of quiet in place of the tangle which exists.

The lower deck, if one may so call it, of a monitor engaged in pounding an enemy who is invisible except to the seaplanes scudding overhead, is scarcely the place where one expects to meet optimism tinged with the fatalism of the East, yet there one heard it on the lips of a bluejacket.

It was a brilliant day, opaline, brisk, but so still that the queer ship stood revealed in shadow, line

beyond line, even to her greyness, on the sleeping waters of the harbour. Her odd shape was attenuated, her tripod mast and fighting-top carried far over to the ship next abeam, and the men, engaged in sponging out H.A. guns, showed in their white rig as upon a mirror. Even the range-finder was there, drawn out, thin, like a rod.

Ten minutes ago we had fired our last shot at the raiders who had broken cover with a sample of their Sunday morning hate. The din of anti-aircraft guns and the crash of bombs falling on the town and harbour was over, perhaps for the day. Men had been busy with the guns; busy with bets which failed, and entranced by the small whorls of white smoke germinating in the blue; busy watching the silver-winged midges which flashed overhead, listening to the gnat-like drone of their engines which made a background for the crashes, spitting far, far beneath; and now our sea-planes were in chase.

What would happen up there in the dazzling sunshine? Would Briton or Hun triumph? Icarus-like our enemies had flashed over sea, felt the heat of our fire and now were away, perhaps to reach their lines unscorched, perhaps to oscillate slowly to the sea which waited, smiling, to quench the flame which had touched them. Who of us all knew? No one. To-morrow, it may be, or a week hence, a note of that flight would appear in dry type—a note which might be of victory tempered with pain.

The monitor had no casualties, as the phrase goes, the town a few; but at less than a cable's length from the ship's side the bridge of a mine-sweeper was in ruins.

A bomb had made a direct hit here, yet the mine-sweeper still threw a tremulous shadow upon the sea, still coquetted with the little rills which entered

the harbour from the sea. Skipper and crew were clustered examining the wreckage. The bomb had carried a full load of T.N.T., yet its weight alone had done the damage. A sailor, no longer on a platform working high-angle guns, drew the attention of his friend to these facts as they leaned over the rail watching.

"Their number wasn't up," said the man with the definition of an expert. "No one goes out before it is hoisted. That proves it."

No. 1 demurred. He was less sure, the day very beautiful. Nor did he point out, as he might, the fatalism dormant in this statement.

"And my number isn't up," his pal resumed, "nor yours either . . . nor any of us who stood near that gun . . . else she would have burst and blown us all to Jiminy."

He referred to the bomb, which even now was being moved by experts who handled it with the caution of full knowledge.

"Then I am safe for the trip," No. 1 laughed; "and you are safe too."

"Safe as houses," said the man; then added: "Of course, you can never tell *when* your number is hoisted. It may go up any minute, and," he closed irrelevantly, "she's a daisy in a beam sea."

"It looks like fine weather," the other suggested, "doesn't it?"

"It is due," said his friend. "Overdue. Too much sun. A bit foxy out there," he jerked to indicate the North Sea. "Last night we nearly rolled the soul-case out of us . . . but, we potted some Fritz."

An hour later the monitor sailed to experiment. The cliffs of England are beautiful in all lights;

but never so beautiful as when you leave them shimmering against the emerald and blue streaks which front them, and go forth to search the unknown.

The coast of Flanders is still *terra incognita* to the ships which would search out emplacements and peer amidst the dunes for objectives—still the lying-in-wait ground of U-boats, in a track which monitors must pass before they gain the comparative safety of the shoals. But men who sail in our defence take these things for granted. Time was when the U-boat inspired nervousness, when the strongest thrilled at the notion of being jerked into eternity by a thing so uncanny. A ship collapses, you understand, as swiftly and completely as a bull when the matadore's knife touches his spinal column. Waiting for a *coup de grâce* so sudden and overwhelming is very like waiting for bombs in an air-raid. Man in these circumstances must seek a hole and burrow like a rabbit; but there are no holes or dug-outs on a ship's deck. The submarine may not have been seen or heard. An aeroplane is an atom of gossamer, balanced perhaps 15,000 feet overhead, giving out the song of a mosquito as warning. The next bomb may fall on your house; you feel it coming, cold messengers astir down your back; so with the torpedo which may or may not have been launched at your ship, which may or may not be on its way to scatter you, ship and crew, in an instant of time.

In spite of these things, or perhaps because of them, a rendezvous had been made, and now three monitors crept seaward from Margate Elbow, and about them moved a screen of destroyers.

When the North Sea is at its best, sunlit, apeing the greater oceans, you may expect a new spell of the devil that is in it. When it is not white with

mist it is yellow, jaundiced with the sand which boils up from the bottom; when it is neither white nor yellow it is black, hitting at you with bitter winds, and the horizon has narrowed down to a smoke ring which climbs towards the zenith, sinks, climbs again, sinks, shuts in like a trap.

To-day it was white in patches, despite the blue of the English scene. By-and-by it would be white all over, and the opportunity for which men had waited banished to the Kalends.

The ships steamed at their best speed, a trio of comical design, while destroyers moved about them, imps of the sea at full tilt—because, when you consider it, slow ships invite attack.

Foam mounted like rolling hills in the wake of these imps, foam clustered shining at their bows; between was a millrace, hollowed out, which swept the side hissing. Helter-skelter they sped, a zigzag centre-piece their loadstone—round and about like merry children, the whole white world their playground. Sometimes flags flicked out on bowed halyards to decorate them; sometimes the arms of semaphores wagged solemn advice from seniors grown cautious with years. Under that sparkling sun they seemed to be engaged upon some criss-cross pastime, threading a maze at follow-my-leader, careening, dipping at the bidding of a rudder.

So they moved in the glare till they came to the shoals, folded into a screen, husbanded fuel, and listened while the admiral sent back messages, known to the Navy as W/T, announcing progress.

Then out of the haze which wrapped the west came giant seaplanes which dropped to the surface and taxied alongside.

The crew were standing easy, the seaplanes hissing like geese at the ships.

"Hardly necessary to go in yet, sir?" the commander hailed.

The officer of the watch consulted his captain and returned.

"The answer is in the negative," he shouted, with a hint at badinage.

"Right-o!" came back in the sing-song of youth; then with a twist, "Arising out of that answer, sir, I beg to ask . . ."

"Oh, dry up, Rivers. You aren't *there* yet."

"Please God I never will be," quoth Rivers. "Hallelujah!" He switched off and dropped astern, waving to his observer.

The two men leaned over the rail watching. The by-play of political phrasing was not Greek to these two. They knew every trick and turn of the game as well as they knew seaplane history. They knew, too, of the strike in full swing among these in the west.

"Handy as a picture-book," said No. 1. "I wish they could see them at home."

"Better see 'em in February, ice to the tip of their wings," said his mate. "Might stop their rotten strikes if they could see them so . . . twelve pound a week, eh!—how's that for sweatin'?"

"Top-hole."

"I'd like to see the half of it."

His friend nodded, exhaling smoke.

"What do they know?" he crooned. "Lord! they are the limit . . . fools, fools! I heard one once"—he spoke in gusts between puffs of smoke—"last time I was on leave . . ."

"Go on," said his pal. "I've met 'em. They take the cake."

"Two of them were talking as I came down a path," he continued, "away outside our village . . .

an oldish man with a fork on his shoulder and an oldish woman leanin' over her garden gate to pass the time of day.

" 'How's Billy gettin' on?' asks the old man as I drew up.

" 'First rate,' says the woman, 'he's drorin' his two pound a week now.'

" 'Not bad f'r a b'y jus' lef' school,' the old man blinks; 'w'y—wot's ee doin' of?'

"The old lady cocked her eye up the lane and saw me comin', saw I was a flat-foot o' sorts, and let out so that I must hear. 'Makin' dum-dum bullets f'r our boys out there in the trenches . . . so's they can kill the 'Uns,' she cried.

"I stopped short," said No. 1, "for she hit at me and I had to—— 'Beg your pardon,' says I, 'but the Army doesn't use dum-dums in the trenches or anywhere else. It's the Germans that use dum-dums against-us.'

" 'Ow do you know?' she asks, 'Are you over there?'

" 'I'm on the Fleet,' says I, 'but I know dum-dums aren't used in our Army.'

"But I might just as well have held my gas. 'I don't think you know anythink about it, young man,' she says. 'You haven't bin at Wy-pers,' she says; 'if you *are* a sailor, you can't know.'

" 'I know enough for that,' I told her.

" 'So you think,' she flings in my face. 'If you 'ad seen wot our boys in khaki 'av seen, an' done a bit more, the war would be over by now. Baa!' she says; 'you can't even keep off them raiders they send—sailor-man!'"

"Dum-dum bullets, eh!" commented his pal. "Lord! wouldn't Fritz like to get hold of that bit! . . ."

"Reckon it would be worth a fiver, Bully-boy ; what ? "

"It would be worth," said his pal, "anything you chose to ask, if you saw the right man."

They leaned over, staring at the water sizzling alongside until a bugle sounded "Action stations," then vanished towards their home in the turret.

"Dum-dum bullets, eh ! " Bully-boy grumbled as he looked to his telescope and training-wheel. "Lord ! I wish we could ! "

No. 1, at his place beside the levers, took no notice. He did not hear. He was busy putting them at safety.

The coast where these things happened aped the sea which bordered it. The air trembled in diaphanous waves above it, as it never trembles over North Sea rollers. That was the sole mark, the dividing line between the two. Visibility from the bridge level was poor already ; but gunners reck little of that. The whole problem has been worked out. As it is possible to portray, by the aid of Mercator, a globe on a flat chart, so it is possible to hit objects which are below your horizon. Glasses are not much use ; seaplanes are heavier, but much more effectual.

As the monitors came upon the tree-shrouded *Königsberg*, stowed deep in Rufigi delta, got the range and pounded her to pieces, so these light draft ships came upon the Belgian sand-dunes, registered, and got to work, in spite of invisible targets.

A seaplane buzzed over the still sea, rising like a giant albatross, and, when abreast of the ship, lifted and hummed into the blue. He was the spotter for the leading monitor, and his messages W/T'd home would be taken in, decoded, and spoken to the fighting-top, as it is sometimes called, by the wireless operator seated in a small cabin deep in the heart of the ship.

Roughly the range would be somewhere about eleven miles. On a really clear day it would be possible, by climbing to the truck, to see something of what happened; but to-day the commander, gunnery lieutenant, and range-finder were as blind as the gun crew fifty feet below in the turret.

A message came through from the airman, a jangle of reports, far off, somewhere behind that rampart of foam, and instantly the starboard gun lifted its nose, swerved to the left, and fired.

In the turret was a small report; the gun came back upon its buffers, checked, slid out.

In comparison with the clang and jar of the cage, carrying shells and charge from the magazine, the sound was small. It seemed impossible to realise in the domed gun-house that a shell weighing nearly three-quarters of a ton had gone on its errand; but in the control, aloft, or on the bridge the roar it made was plain to all ears. A moment later the breech fell back and compressed air went whining through, cleaning out the gun.

One hears but little in a turret but a few sharp orders, and interspersed with them varying crashes, groans, and the hiss of hydraulic pressure. A man with his eye on the tell-tale sees "Raise" upon it, looks to the breech, to the rammer, and jams over his cage lever. Everything goes with the crash of steel; there is nothing quite like it anywhere, for in that confined space steel walls throw back the sound on steel decks or hood, jangling as though experimenting in noise. But the roar *par excellence* is reserved for the cage, which flies up, stops dead before the open breech, and is followed by the loose clang of the rammer as it drives the shell home. Again two astounding crashes follow, and after each the loose bang of the rammer, as two packages of

explosive arrive by way of the cage and are jammed home. Then, very gently in comparison, the great breech swings to, and in the centre of it one sees a sector screw tight without hands.

On this No. 1's voice was heard proclaiming "Right gun loaded," while following it another called through the light-strung gloom figures which gave the required elevation. Two men came into play here twisting little wheels, one the gunlayer, the other the trainer; and between them, in a moment of time it seemed, the thing, whatever it was, had been done. A man leaned forward at this and inserted in the centre of that enormous breech of shining steel a little cartridge, less in size than that of a rifle, and leaned back.

Some one said briskly, "Right gun ready," and again a voice, "Turret ready." At this some one must have given the order to fire, yet all one noted was the report of the gun, subdued, rolling in the gunhouse. The crash made a moment earlier by the cage was a triumph in noise compared with this echo. One saw the gun plunging back, lifting a little as it nuzzled with the buffers, almost before one knew that it had been fired. At first, it seemed, I had been too absorbed to hear the roar which experience had taught me must be the voice of a 15-inch gun; yet it was not until I left the turret that I heard its full tone or realised that one may perceive an acrid taste without having taken either food or drink.

In the control, far away to the right beyond the growing mist, one saw airmen busy, like rooks about their nests in spring. Sometimes they were high up, sometimes low; sometimes it seemed they were lost, our eyes gone with them; then again they appeared, floating in space, while companion planes

darted about fighting the swarm which rose to meet them. Sometimes little bursts of gunfire touched our ears ; sometimes the crash of a shell which failed in the mist to reach us out there upon the sea ; but always, mingled with the roar of our guns, messages came in from beyond—an odd assortment of letters, figures, “M.13,” said one, “K.L.” another, “L.G.,” “G.25 ” . . . * Sometimes strange aberrations, perhaps from enemy operators : “Didn’t observe fall of shot . . .,” “500 short,” “250 ” to the right.”

Then at a voice-pipe a man sang aloud, as one at prayers—“M. for Mary, 13,” “K. for King,” “L. for Long,” and the rest—all through the splitting shock of gunfire, the fumes from muzzles which leaned out nosing about like lean, grey lizards seeking their prey.

Two hours of this, then the mist won ; we recalled our airmen and started whence we came, triumphant that a bridge had been knocked out at something over eleven miles with two direct hits out of three ; that an ammunition store had flared at our touch and the docks whence submarines emerged to worry shipping had suffered from our fire.

I think, though, I preferred the fascination of the control, with eerie whispers coming out of space, whispers which might mean much or little, death or life, to that of the gunhouse. Noise after a time becomes annoying, and, although the gun roar was stifled within the turret, the continual clang of metal on metal was tremendous. In the presence, too, of those vast forces quiet seemed essential—thought seemed essential. The monstrous and sinister aspect of the guns compelled attention ; they

* These are not the letters used.

appeared to demand respect, yet they twisted, lifted, sank in obedience to the touch of a lever, or the turn of a wheel a man could spin with one hand. The rolls of cordite, which were flung up like giant sausages on a lift, carried in a tray, shot out, pushed home in a manner at once ignominious and indicative of immense wisdom, became absorbing. One wished to prolong the thing, to hold it poised. Imagination cried out, "But suppose . . . suppose," and fell back upon the plain fact that here, at all events, was no time for supposition . . . that it was dead and fact reigning in its place.

And in a mist which was white and enveloping as steam we crept back to our base, discovered it without fuss, and sat down to clean our guns.

THE MEN OF THE DARK RED CROWN.

*There is war on the land we love, and war on the sea as
well,
War by air, by sap and mine, with the gingering tricks
of Hell ;
And war on the folk who are old, and war on infant
bloom—
But the war that traps and flays and stills is war in the
engine-room.*

.

Working near the humming turbines, shut away from
noise and *flair*,
Engineers by gong and voice-pipe talk with those
poised high in air ;
Watching crank-shafts whirring madly, discs that
blink and slide and grin,
Noting how they cluck and joggle when men push
to make her spin.

See them on the starting platform, steam beside them,
steam below,
Cabled Force in wires beyond them, little knobs to
press in row ;
All the coiled and fateful fitments shaped to ends of
death or life,
Under hand of " Luff " or Captain when he calls, as
now, in strife.

See them keen to read the orders in a vault that
hums with Force,
Waiting silent in an oven, hearing phrases spelled in
Morse . . .

While the steam is throbbing, roaring, and the brush
which makes the spark
Hums away for death or glory, making daylight of
the dark.

Hear the guns roar there on platform, guess the way
a shell will fall,
As men throb at turning levers, sweating blindly at
each call ;
Watch them go away to stokehold, joke with men
before the fires—
“ Pressure failing ? ” “ England daunted ? ” in the
phrases of our sires.

Breathing breath of blazing furnace, peeping through
the mica screen,
Shovelling coal or tending oil-spray, cheering as they
work or lean,
Watch the firemen making records, joking as they
hear the drone
Of boilers towering high above them, carrying death
within each zone.

Note the clicking, tricky tell-tales, standing there
their work to show,
See the dusky, bubbled gauges warning men it's time
to blow ;
Watch the shirtless, sweating torsos, glow on arm
and shoulder blade,
Lines of black that mark the creases as they ply their
aching trade.

Hear them cheer each boom that echoes from the
guns in turret high,
As they twist and writhe and mutter, throwing
spray-clouds to the sky ;

Mark the din when shells ricochet, enter casemate,
 pierce the skin,
Shake the grim, steel-strutted structure, blast and
 bleach amidst the din ;

Listen to the shout of stokers when above the boilers'
 drone,
Crashes full the shell that pierces, beams which were
 the boilers' throne,
Wrecks them with the tearing fury of a blow that
 is supreme,
Splint'ring all the steel-strung girders, freeing Hell
 with scalding steam.

Watch the stokers, pressure balanced, raking out
 the fires and flame,
Water sizzling up about them till the roll-call lacks
 a name,
Hear them cheering there in stokehold, turning valves
 and drawing fires,
Cheering blindly in a cavern nipped and twitching
 like steel wires ;

Till the slowly heeling platform, balanced by more
 distant beams,
Fills with running boiling water as it rills and flows
 and steams . . .
Mark the faces looking upward, faces blanched and
 lying down,
Till the crush and rush of workers fighting now for
 those who drown,

Rise above them, stagger upward, when the word
 goes out to sally,
Hear the wit and boyish jesting as they climb to
 make "their tally,"

Facing shells and Charon calmly, facing God or
 "Number One,"

Racing up to "chance the odds" 'neath a crimson,
 westering sun.

See them stripped, half-naked, bleeding, as they
 make for ladders nigh,

Ladders leading up to Heaven, piercing casings
 which defy,

Bullets lashing, splinters flying, as they climb there
 to the door,

Swaying this way, swaying that way, telling now of
 home on shore.

Cheering mateys lightly wounded, nursing those the
 steam has flayed,

Till the swollen seas before them leap 'neath gun
 which boomed and bayed.

Watch them now the decks are tilted, sliding down
 to reach the wave,

See them greet the wind of winter blowing keen from
 northern cave ;

Cheering as they take their plunge-bath, shouting as
 they scatter chaff,

For there, within the western gloaming, was the Hun
 who could not laugh,

Dour and dogged, maimed and beaten, down and
 sinking spite of odds,

Standing in the flush of gloaming like a cromlech of
 the gods.

.
Hail ! for the engine-room,
Hail ! for the men deep down,
Engineer, fireman, trimmer,
Men of the Dark Red Crown.

CHAPTER V

NOORD HINDER

Guns and Efficiency.—Engineers, Firing, and the R.N.A.S.

FAR out where the lips of the estuary touched the sea lay a group of four destroyers, blue-black against the silver of a mirror which usually is smirched and grey. Over their fat funnels was a blue diaphanous haze, tremulous, flickering, which pointed to imprisoned force, to heat, which is the essence of force, to instant readiness for a dash, should the gods so will it.

They were the "duty squad" of the fleet which lay in shore, basking in the sun.

As I came near in the flagship's launch a pair of whalers drew out of the glare with crews at full stretch, the coxswains leaning forward, back, pushing with hands which timed the stroke, shouting, evidently keen set.

The men were in singlets and shorts—men of muscle, browned, big. They flashed past us with a grunt and a surge of oars on each stroke: "Now! Now! Lift her!" The coxswains crooned "Now! . . . Now!" and the bent forms straightened with the sound.

There seemed but little between the two as they passed, but I thought the nearer crew had the finer swing, the better incidence. It was a moot point which would win though, and presently when they rounded the flagship's stern there was not half a length between them.

Five minutes later I mounted the gangway of T.B.D. X2 and met the smiling glance of her chief gunner.

"Commander's compliments, sir, and apologies," he said at once. "He told me to say he got your signal just as the crews were ready to start. He was quite sure you would understand, because . . . Ah! Here's the engineer-commander. . . ."

He fell back a pace and the newcomer took up the phrase :

"Because the admiral said you are a sailor, sir . . . Glad to see you on board."

"*Was!*" I interjected, as we shook hands.

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it? Once a sailor always a sailor. . . . A question of tense—words which refer to yesterday, to-day or to-morrow, and blink the fact that what was, *is*."

"You are very sure," I laughed, because there was no mistaking his sincerity.

"I wrote a paper once to prove it. It was a good paper . . . it took me nearly twelve months to do it," he sighed.

"Where did you send it?" I asked.

"The point," said he, "is where did I not send it? I began with the *Saturday* and *Spectator* and finished up with *Tit-Bits*. The editor of *Tit-Bits* advised me to reconstruct it and send it to the Religious Tract Society; but I refused. Probably that is the reason it was not printed. I had great visions of being an author in those days!" Again he sighed; but a twinkle lurked which belied the suggestion.

"If you had continued . . ." I commenced.

"There would have been no Silent Fleet!" he interjected.

"It is scarcely inarticulate to-day, is it? Why

not give us the benefit of your experience—what an engine-room is like in a scrap, as they call it ? ”

“ Whisht ! ” said he ; and then “ God forbid ! ” with undoubted fervour, switched off and remarked, “ That reminds me ”—which was not true—“ the commander said he was sure that in the circumstances you would forgive his temporary absence.”

I waived the point and assured him I would not have spoiled the spin for the world.

“ The fact is we are rather keen on this race,” he explained. “ We have a lot of points to pull up . . . besides, it does the men good, keeps them fit and gives them something to talk about while we are waiting for Fritz.”

We were on interesting ground here, and I challenged at once :

“ You haven’t seen much of him since Jutland, have you ? ”

“ Absolutely stalemate,” he avowed, “ and will remain so until he is driven out.”

“ You think that should be done ? ” I questioned.

“ Should ? ” he demurred, his eyes twinkling. “ Nay---I did not go so far ; but we could get him out . . . ”

“ Then why this halt ? ”

“ In conjunction with the soldiers, of course,” he concluded.

“ Then why . . . ” I commenced ; but he cut in with his dry smile :

“ Nay, I’m not discussing military tactics, because I happen to be engineer commander and conversant only with steam ; but if you ask me whether he is likely to come out if we don’t force him I am inclined to say No . . . not as things are. If you made it hot for him over there it would be another matter. But at the moment, why should he come

out and risk things with a navy less than half our strength?"

"It may be a nearer thing than that," I suggested, "after all these years."

He brooded over that, and the chief gunner said with emphasis: "He has some damned good guns. Often he straddles us with the first salvo. . . . Damned good men behind the guns, too . . . Sixes to meet our fours . . . nines when we are there with sixes . . . it's uncanny. But he goes to pieces quickly. Can't keep it up when we begin to bark. . . ."

"But how can you bark when the odds are against you to that extent?"

"Get under his guard. Rush him . . . speed," he chuckled; "dare-devilry, guts. That's what comes of training plus a trifle of nous. We have nous . . . Fritz has none. You have to tell your Sausage what to do or he won't do it . . . If I'm knocked out the buntin'-tossers would carry on . . . or an engine-room rating . . . anything that can walk. That's where guts come in. It's where we shall do them in . . ."

"But if they meet your sixes with nines and twelves, always," I suggested, "it must . . ."

"Oh but, they don't!" the engineer-commander interjected. "Sometimes the boot is on the other foot . . ." He looked up with shining eyes:

" 'Tis all a chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays;
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays . . . '

That," he urged, "is the bedrock of talk—all thought on the subject. I couldn't make it plainer in a week."

The chief gunner wriggled with his finger in one

ear. "If you're goin' to quote poetry, sir, in proof of trajectory," he said, "I'm away."

"It's the only thing worth living for," the engineer-commander rapped out. "Come—I'll give you ten minutes for your guns . . . ten minutes—no more, no less ; so get her jacket off and let us look at her."

She was a beauty, you may be sure of that—clean, shining, and so workable that a man sitting on the gunlayer's saddle could twist and turn her with the finger of one hand. I remarked on the wonderful balance and the gunner took that for his text at once.

"Balance," said he, "is the twin of speed. If you have balance you have speed, and if you have speed you get on to your target while the other fellow is fiddling with sights . . . *and*, if you can cap the two of them with nous, as we Britishers can, you will have Fritz well on his way to the ditch long before he is ready to smack back. . . . But then, we are born sailors ; *they* are only soldiers at sea. . . . We have been at war all our lives ; they are only beginning. They are good, mind ; but they are not as good as we are, because they are not as old as we are at the sea game.

"We have been at it twelve hundred years or so ; they"—he snapped his fingers—"twenty-five. Every sort of force is up against a sailor-man. Gunnery isn't learned by target-practice ashore, but on deck or in the barbette of a ship that's swinging thirty degrees each roll and pitching bows under at the same time. That requires handling. There's nothing automatic about it—it's man-atic, and the chap that can keep on a target when his gun is mounted on a thing which is about as steady as a cask in a tide rip deserves. . . . Well, the commander is here, or I would tell you what I think he deserves. Ou-aye !

I know, I know ; but ” he chuckled, “ if you are in any kind of doubt what can be done with a gun under these conditions ‘ buy an ‘am,’ as that chap Pycroft said, ‘ an’ see life ! ’ ”

“ Here ? ” I questioned.

“ I don’t suppose she’d buck at carrying you ”— he tossed back, rubbing his hands, enjoying himself immensely ; “ but that is only the opinion of a chief gunner, and as it’s more a question of weights an’ displacement than trajectory you’ll understand I’m not laying down the law, or . . . ”

“ Fools tramp where wise men dare not tread,” the engineer-commander paraphrased, his face a study.

“ Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” the gunner corrected. “ Had you there, sir, in spite of Osborne and the Luck of Dow’s Flat . . . ”

“ First you stagger me with Omar, and now with Bret Harte,” I complained ; “ I ask you a simple question relative to that digging-out process we were promised and you land me on Dow’s fence . . . ”

“ Whisht ! ” said the gunner (his finger lifted) ; “ they’re coming ! ”

“ They ” were the two boats, and we turned, laughing, to watch.

“ A dollar,” the gunner cried as he span ; “ the Owner wins . . . one dollar. I’m a poor man, broke by the war, but . . . ”

“ On the make,” the engineer-commander decided. “ When will you leave something to chance ? The Owner’s leading by a length.”

“ Two, sir. I’m giving nothing away these times.”

We moved aft and stood watching.

“ Officers *versus* Crew,” the engineer-commander explained. “ Both doing their damndest. Officers leading . . . ”

"Their prerogative," said the chief gunner, "it comes from their training on the Dart . . . eight ! But I would have liked to have been there."

"In your next incarnation," the engineer-commander announced, "you will be an instructor at Osborne. If you had bagged that Fritz last Tuesday it would have been the Dart . . . but now!" He moved, expressing the burden of failure.

"Dartmouth or Hades," the gunner decided, his eyes thoughtful in spite of the alternative. "Whisht ! See the boats. . . ."

We turned and saw the rear crew spurting gamely as they drew up—saw, too, that it would avail them nothing. The officers moved with the same even swing I had noted as they passed up river ; the men were working harder, the coxswain timing them with tremendous energy : "Now ! Now !" His voice came over to us like a prayer.

But it was too late. In five minutes the officers tossed oars abreast our counter, then paddled easily to the ladder. The gunner moved away to the blue-jackets who were watching : "Lines there ! Lively now ! Smack it about !" and steadily proclaimed that he was the sole sportsman on board.

The commander climbed the short ladder and advanced to meet me, holding out his hand. "Sorry I wasn't here to welcome you," he smiled. "Hope they have been looking after you, eh ?"

He was blue-eyed, clean-shaven, and big enough to have made a guardsman. In his shorts and jersey, a sweater hung by the arms about his shoulders, he looked young enough to be emerging from a trial spin on the Dart, fit enough to bring an eight first past the post either at Henley or Mortlake.

In a moment we had known each other half a life-

time, and he was introducing me to the men as they trooped up from their boat. Here was Number One, here Torps, here Pay, here old Pills . . . A lieutenant and a snotty completed the crowd. It was a good race. The boys had given them all they wanted. He called after Stroke as he danced along the rail carrying the boat's painter: "If you had spurted five minutes sooner, Peter, you would have rolled us up"; and Stroke at the salute looked as though he believed it.

We stood in a group chatting and staring at the sparkling river. That suggested a swim, and the commander turned away shaking his head. "Can't be done," I heard him say.

"Would you go in if I were not here?" I asked.

"Rather," came instantly from the group.

"For two pins I would join you," I laughed.

"Splendid!"

After that there could be no escape from men bent on swimming, and this the commander made plain.

"Carry on while I get unrigged," I begged. "I shall have to cool down first."

Towels and a bunch of drawers rose miraculously from the hatchway and fell at our feet. There was a scuffle of men in shorts and men without shorts, then a swift run up the deck forward. The commander stepped over the rail and stood a moment, balanced, then took the water with a splendid spring. Torps followed; in pairs and singly the others leaped, swam out, headed the tide a minute, and came back to the ladder, climbed on board, raced forward, and again dived.

The engineer-commander, gunner, and I stood watching.

"It's well to be young," quoth the man of steam and humming turbines.

"Until the war came," the gunner took him up, "I did not know I was old; but now . . ."

"You want oiling like my bearings, eh?"

"An' still I creak," he admitted, solemnly smacking his thigh. "Wae is me, an' still I creak."

Then, quite suddenly, something happened to bring the yeoman of signals aft at a run. He held a slip of paper folded tightly, perhaps because of my presence, which he smuggled into the engineer-commander's hand. I was just ready for my swim and had timed myself to join in the next run for'a'd; but the engineer's eyes said wait a bit, so I pulled a towel round my shoulders.

He had read the note and acknowledged it. The yeoman was waiting orders which came brusquely from the engineer-commander: "Hoist the recall."

He turned to me.

"Better get dressed again," he said. "There will be no sun bath to-day. They will all be on board in a moment. Sorry. You see we are flagship, and this is the duty trot section. We shall be outside in ten minutes."

He began to whistle softly, then, looking up, he whispered:

"And when the Angel with his darker Draught
Draws up to thee—take that, and do not shrink."

"'Buy an'am, sir,'" the gunner chanted, unmoved, "'an' see life.' . . . Maybe it's a Fritz."

The engineer-commander rose smiling and commenced to wave his arms, signalling the recall to the men splashing out there in the sunshine. The commander saw and swam in, climbed the ladder, and stood brushing water from his eyes. "Well?" he questioned.

The engineer opened the note and held it so that it could be read.

There was a brief pause. Water trickled down, shining on the commander's shoulders in the glare.

"Steam at once, Chief," he said, and climbed on board. He raised his voice, looking towards the bridge. "Haul down! Anchor stations!"

A bugle blared the order. "Signal to unmoor and follow me outside."

Almost at once a string of flags climbed the star-board halyards. These were followed after a small interval by a second string to port.

The commander seized his towel and disappeared down the hatchway. He laughed as he passed me, but did not speak. I waited till he reappeared clad for the bridge and for a moment halted. "No swim to-day," he said. "Hard luck! I am off now."

"May I come?" I asked.

"Afraid you must. . . . No time to put you ashore now."

He hurried away.

The other men, officers and bluejackets, had tumbled on board, seized towels and the gear in which they had rowed and vanished, drying and dressing as they ran. Yet the business of heaving up anchor was not delayed. Forward the windlass was singing cheerily and the cable clinking inboard as I moved away to climb the bridge ladder.

Abreast the engine-room casing I halted and looked down. Already a hum was evident, the hiss of steam warming the valves, and turbines singing in the domed enclosure. A thrill ran through the ship as I leaned there, and the hum increased. Overhead the antennæ danced and swirled, shimmering in the sun glare. I hurried on and reached the commander's side.

"What is it, sir?" I asked.

"Some one looking for trouble at North Hinder," he tossed back. "Helm amidships!"

"Helm amidships, sir," echoed the man at the wheel, his eyes glued on the swinging compass.

"Port ten!"

"Port ten it is, sir."

The wheel buzzed. I looked up river and saw the three who shadowed us entering the track we left, up there in the shimmering estuary—saw how they, too, clove its centre and added to the churning wave that flowed away on either hand.

On the esplanade as we rushed seaward two women stood waving handkerchiefs, and I noticed Torps and the navigator Morseing in reply. They did not indicate the nature of this stunt, as they called it, but gave swiftly the *au revoir*, which means so much to those who wait and fain must guess.

In column of line ahead we passed the forts and lightship, edged away to the south, and raced trembling seaward.

It was calm, the sea a mirror which poured away from either bow as the red earth turns outward from a plough. Gulls accompanied us, rose in our path and came circling back to sit in groups upon it, crying, squabbling, preening their wings. It was cold, too, in spite of the sun. What air there was seemed to be drifting from the pole. It pitted the sea here and there with spread-out patches of darker hue. Elsewhere the surface was lined in blue and emerald which died at the horizon in a blur which rolled like smoke upon a prairie, spaced with pink and yellow spirals softly glazed upon the lights.

I was so absorbed that I did not see my friend who quoted Omar until a sub-lieutenant climbed the bridge-ladder to give me his message. "The engineer-

commander thinks it a good opportunity to go below," he said. "They will be whacking her up as soon as we are clear. It is rather a scene downstairs ; but up here, nothing for an hour or so."

I agreed and went at once. They gave me a pair of clean gauntlets, a piece of waste, and led me to a manhole, a small round shaft through which a man of average build could pass without difficulty.

A sailor lifted the cover and the engineer-commander pointed my way. I went down by a ladder which lay against one side of this shaft and stood back against the opposite curve until he joined me. Between us we completely filled the space. Then some one put on the lid, clamped it, and we were in darkness with a vast booming drumming on our ears.

"We have to close the top before we can open up below," said my companion, "or we should be blown out of it like a whiff of smoke. There's a big pressure on . . . forced draught you know. She's humming already."

I heard it and felt the weight. It was as though one had put on the helmet of a diving suit and gone under with the air pressure alone to hold back the rush of water. There was a deadening of sound similar to that produced by hands strongly pressed over the drums of one's ears.

"Better when we get below," the engineer-commander shouted. Then the clang of an opening door assailed me, and I looked down, as it seemed, upon the infernal regions . . . a dim space which seemed befogged ; where light gleamed in patches, pumps clucked, turbines hummed, and the boom of a monstrous drum echoed and vibrated in a twilight which was, perhaps, of the gods.

It all looked so distant, so weird, by this approach

that I pictured one of Sime's drawings and half expected to meet the queer shapes with which he peoples his depths ; but everything was normal. As a matter of fact the space was filled with sound rather than with shapes ; with levers and brackets and polished casings, brass and steel, which reflected light.

When we reached the platform I looked round. One man stood with his back to us. He did not turn. He seemed to be engaged in juggling with round brass knobs, while at odd moments he gave sudden twitches at the two wheels which were fixed elbow-high before him. He was engrossed and serious beyond words. One hand manipulated each side—a wheel and push-knobs exactly similar in character and position lying to the left and right. Facing him in a wide semi-circle was an array of dials, all white-faced, with oscillating hands, as though they feared the power which drummed and rolled about them, up the dim bulkhead where the throbbing grew musical, across the domed upper deck—down, round, endlessly at cannon.

“ Engineer-lieutenant of the watch,” said my companion in a dull shout. “ Keeps him busy ? ”

As we stood there a gong clanged, and the juggler instantly snapped a handle in response and again came back to the bell-pull, push-game, and the little wheels, for all the world as though in truth he juggled.

But the juggling was work, the push-knobs and the little wheels and gong clamour the means by which he gave effect to the orders which reached him. Through them alone he kept the sea boiling in our wake, our distance from next astern a miracle of accuracy, and enabled us to cover the distance between our base and Noord Hinder in eighty minutes.

It was amazingly simple, so I gathered, when you

had learned your job ; and for this he had been prepared at Osborne and Dartmouth, where for long days he had worked amidst lathes and patterns, with files, cold chisels and planes, until he was hand-perfect, able to take his place at this nearly automatic control. He stood before us as the central figure of the whole force of mechanism which ended in the propulsion, at something like forty miles an hour, of a fighting unit racing to the succour of unknown friends.

It was easy to understand down there how remote is the engine-room staff from the varying incidents of a fight. In the presence of a roar which filled one's ears and compelled us to shout and watch each other's lips, the noise of guns would scarcely be heard. A shell bursting somewhere within those steel walls would bring reality in a moment, the scalding breath of the boilers ; but shells tearing at the decks and superstructure would fail. In all truth these men of the engine-room and stokehold stand or fall in the keeping of their brothers who are on deck. They answer signals made on telegraphs, hear the gong clang, reach over and get speech through voice-tubes with the bridge ; but they see nothing and can gather little of the progress made up there where at a turn of the wheel their vessel leaps away at a tangent, buried in foam, to escape a torpedo—zig-zags and twists amidst clouds of dense smoke to spoil an enemy's aim.

Nervy work, my masters—done in the nerve centre of force ; done silently, done without question, quibble or hesitance, with an endurance too full for words ; that is the part of those who work in a bath of sweat while others shiver and are bathed in salt.

We came by doorways which we clamped behind

us—through tubes like ventilators, up steel-runged ladders, through a maze with engines working at 450 revolutions to the minute—to a new inferno where the drone of turbines was dead, swallowed by the roar of fans and flaming oil.

We had reached the stokehold, and speech was impossible, shouting of small effect. The engineer-commander leaned near and formed words slowly with his lips—made signs which I accepted as one accepts all things where the issue appears to be either that of life or death. I had lost all note of sensation. We were enveloped in a roar which seemed to grow the longer we were in it. It seemed to resent my presence, and the breath of the fires came at me like naked flame. Four stokers clad in singlets and pants sweated before the arched backs of their furnaces. Sometimes one turned away and moved a wheel, sometimes touched the throbbing gauge with which each furnace was crowned, sometimes stood solemnly regarding the whole amazing chaos of tubes and pipes with which the place was patterned. The vibration was tremendous. Everything quaked, jiggled, or swayed unsteadily to and fro. It seemed I had reached Ultima Thule and must abide the result.

The engineer-commander touched my arm, and I saw in his hand a framed mica screen, like a hand-glass of oblong shape. He shouted something and I took it from him. He made signs which suggested that I should approach the nearest furnace. The stoker who guarded it reached up and opened a little slit near the crown of it and pointed. Then, looking through the mica, I saw a leaping volume of flame, as at the heart of a volcano, watched it twisting, swirling and roaring all down the curved length of the furnace. The heat gushed out and scorched my face. Some one touched a button or

pressed a valve and the flame increased. I stepped back. It seemed angry, bent on reprisals ; I could not face it. . . . Then some one controlled the flow, shut to the sliding door, and again it was possible to breathe.

How many furnaces existed in that spick and span inferno is for statisticians : I made no effort to count. The air pressure was beyond anything I had ever experienced on the hither side of a diving helmet, the noise so threatening I lost all count of facts. The roar became oppressive, the pressure pain. My ears throbbed, thumped ; I was glad to escape.

I have called the place an inferno, yet that is a misnomer. It suffices, perhaps, to bring home the essential degree of heat and whirl ; but it is unfair to those splendid men who work for long hours in its depths, doing nothing, as I was assured, that we may live. How much they do or do not do is beside the mark. The place was too clean for idleness, too polished, too mirror-like for no work. Everything was clean. I had no need for gauntlets—perhaps they were given me in case my “long-shore” hands should find the rails hot. I cannot well imagine them cold. Indeed, while enduring what I endured I put up a petition that in the next incarnation some other sinner should be drawn for stoker lest I should wholly die.

An armchair in the wardroom, a cigarette, and a most seductive accompaniment made things cool again, and I faced further trials without qualms. I had been half an hour shut away from the deck, perhaps rather more, and it seemed good to see it again, to sniff the breeze instead of oil, to remember there was a stunt on, and to speculate on that Noord

Hinder message which had come between us and our sun-bath that glowing August day.

We had lunch in sections. Only the commander failed to visit the wardroom. The bridge held him, where, in company with a bunting-tosser, he continued to control the duty squad.

It was greasy now instead of clear. The area of visibility seemed to be reduced in proportion to our advance; but we throbbed on at full speed, tossing back the scintillating bow-wave and drawing the straight white track we had commenced at the base.

We were nearing the lightship, and our companions the only vessels in sight, when a sub-lieutenant entered the wardroom to ask me if I would care to return to the bridge. He said we should soon know all there was to know, and suggested that, as I was not equipped for fighting, I might bring my camera and get some snapshots. He said they were all aching to cut out the *Broke* crowd, and my kodak really did look like the real thing—so would I?

As we passed upstairs my friend the gunner leaned over and said: "We shall be in at the death, whatever it is. Listen!"

I listened all the way between the wardroom and the bridge. What I heard was quite new to me. It droned like the engine of an aircraft and hissed as no flying-machine ever yet hissed. There was a sound of splashing, too, which grew in volume as we hurried forward.

"Taxi-ing," said my companion as we reached the ladder.

"Who—what?"

"Seaplane, sir, for a dollar."

I reached the commander's side and found him staring through glasses at a whitish splotch which

broke upon the greens and blues of the North Sea. He glanced round as I joined him and I saw that the gun crews were at stations.

"Just in time," said the commander. "What d'you think of the engine-room?" Then without pause he added: "Helm amidships! Keep her so. . . . Slow both engines."

I looked round and saw the curve we had made, saw a string of flags come down, and noted the answering curve of the three who followed. I had forgotten the question the commander had tossed out.

"One of our scouts," he resumed, as I took my glasses from their case. "See him? Winged, too, by the look of it." He called a messenger and sent him at the double to advise our doctor, twisted, and said: "They are a fine crowd—R.N.A.S., you know. They will take on a dozen Gothas single-handed and come through. . . . I wonder what this boy has been up to! . . . By Jove! there are two of them. No wonder he's taxi-ing. . . . Stop!" He raised his voice a trifle and the gong clanged. He called the chief yeoman and gave instructions which resulted in a double hoist of bunting and a swift agitation of the semaphore arms.

This was interpreted by the destroyers who followed us, and they immediately began to circle at full tilt, one emitting a smoke screen which effectually ringed the advancing planes and ourselves.

"Just as well to be on the safe side," said the commander. "The section is alive with U-boats. . . . Astern both engines. . . . Stop! Helm to port!"

We leaned over the bridge screen examining the procession with our glasses.

The seaplane was taxi-ing, as it is termed, and towing a machine which looked as though she had

been used as a target by a whole battery of machine-guns. The wings were shot to ribbons, some of the struts gone, the engine pierced, and in the pilot's seat was the boy who had come through his ordeal of battle at ten thousand feet and had safely brought what they called "the poor old 'bus" to sea level.

In five minutes we had him on board and the doctor busy replacing the rough tourniquet which had been fixed at Noord Hinder Lightship rather more than an hour before.

His pal, who had plucked him safely so far, had clambered on board at once on reaching us, helped to lift him from the 'bus, helped to carry him to sick bay, and now stood beside us on the bridge, a boy in years, but a man in experience.

"Yes," he explained; "I sent the message asking for help. I was afraid that rotten plug wouldn't stick it. . . . You can't do much with a cork and a fathom of bunting, sir, can you? So I thought I had better send in an S.O.S. . . . Rotten bad luck on you, sir," he smiled up at the commander. "Expect you sent me to Hades, or somewhere equally uncomfortable. . . . Sorry! Hate to spoil sport . . . but he had rather a rotten bit of luck after putting two Huns out . . . an' I rather wanted him to get the benefit of it . . . D.S.O., perhaps, if he pulls through."

"What's his name?" asked the commander.

"Harding, sir, but I call him Bunny."

"Long at it?"

"About two months out of the egg."

"On patrol, then?"

"Yes. . . . You see we were sweeping up between here and Noord Hinder when Harding spotted a Fritz lying doggo on the surface . . . getting a sun-bath to freshen the nip. I was away on his

flank, but near enough to see Bunny swoop down to five hundred or thereabouts and drop a bomb. Fritz was napping . . . sun a bit warm, perhaps. Anyhow, he didn't spot what he was up against till it was too late ; then he was all mixed up with bits of iron and oil and things. A dicky shot ! He just cracked up like an egg and went in. . . . I dropped down too, and by the time I was near enough spotted two more Fritzes just clear of Bunny's tail. I shouted to him, but he was too busy making sure of No. 1 to remember there might be others. . . . So the fellows emerged and let go a round at him . . . played the deuce with his wings, but nothing more before I could cut in. . . . I dropped a bomb on No. 2. . . . No. 3 dived like mad, so did No. 2 . . . but I think she had *her* medicine all right, for we saw a lot of stuff floating where she went down and a big black splotch came up right over the place.

"We dropped on to the sea and had a skitter round. Harding got a snap of it . . . and then, afraid we were rather busy, sir, trying to make sure, we heard the drone of planes somewhere overhead. . . .

"I looked up ; so did Harding. . . .

" 'Huns, Peter, old thing,' he shouted.

" 'Ten of him if I can count,' said I. " 'Let's go for 'em,' said Bunny, and he started his engines full bore. I did the same . . . spotted a couple of 'em nose diving for us as we got up. We climbed as though the old gentleman was on our tail and dodged their swoop. Harding let go a drum at his ; I did the same at mine. Then we played 'em a bit and Harding got home. . . . Sent his beggar spinning down in flames. . . . Bag up to date one submarine and one Gotha to Harding, probable submarine to me. . . .

"My fellow cleared out when he saw his pal's number was up. . . . I wasn't sorry, for my gun

had jammed over the last burst and I was busy trying to clear her.

"I was so busy that I didn't see Harding start to climb until I missed him ; then I followed, going all out. . . ."

"What about your gun ?" asked the commander.

"Hopeless, sir . . . and there was no time to tinker with it then. Harding had engaged a chap on the wing of the Hun formation, and as I climbed I saw them cuckooing up and down, tail and nose, trying to get in a position to strike. . . . They looked like a pair of cockerels facing each other for the first time. Presently Harding turned and ran, firing like mad . . . then quite suddenly he shut off, dropped and looped up as the Hun swept by. I felt quite dizzy. I thought he was done in, but in a minute he came down, and I saw him crash on the Hun's tail, swerve clear, and Boche No. 2 crackled down the slope. . . .

"You should have seen him go, sir. . . . I'm no good at description, but it was a regular spin, like a square of tin—like a leaf oscillating to the ground on a quiet day . . . like—oh! Chucks, like the devil," Peter concluded with a snap, glancing up, half ashamed of letting himself go.

"Good boy!" said the commander. "Gad! I like his pluck."

"It's his twelfth pip, sir," Peter explained, enthusiastic at the note of praise.

"In two months? Lord have mercy on the Huns!"

"Trust Bunny, sir. He's not done in. He's just resting, so he said. I think he deserves it. . . ."

"Rather," said the Commander.

"But that tops off the score," Peter announced ruefully. "We were in for it . . . Bunny was up and I was down. Our game was to keep together."

He lighted a cigarette and puffed a cloud. "Then quite suddenly my gun got clear. Lord knows what I did to the bally thing. I was thinking of Bunny up at ten thousand, perhaps, and me tugging at locks and gadgets to make you mad. I got going and presently saw poor old Bunny trying to cut out a wing bird and the whole formation on his back. I climbed. I *was* sick. The Huns had their teeth set . . . there were four of them actually on him . . . no kind of sport that . . . when I got up and chipped in. Then for a bit things seemed rosy. We took on the old game, side-slipping, diving, up and around, letting off drums like smoke, but we had no luck. We were up against wary birds who hunted in couples too, and presently Bunny and I were each facing a pair. We wanted eyes all round and hadn't got 'em. . . .

"I knew, somehow, we were going to get socks. Don't know why . . . tired perhaps. Wrestling with that blitherin' gun had taken quite a lot of doing. Time the other fellow got a look in I s'pose. . . . They say some one regulates these things, and I fancy it's true. . . . Anyhow, suddenly I saw Bunny go spinning down in a nose dive which he made no effort to check. . . . I knew his tricks; but this was not one of 'em. The Huns had got him as he tried to loop up after a skitter. I just caught sight of a pale face twitching with pain as he flashed past, and, throwing up my hands, let my machine sit on her tail as though I was hit. . . .

"Bunny's face had unnerved me. I felt I couldn't stick it if he was gone . . . I just had to get down, and I slithered that eight thousand feet in record time. I let her rip . . . I wanted them to think I was done in, for otherwise they would be down to pump lead into us when we touched water. . . .

"They didn't follow. I suppose their squadron commander didn't give them orders. . . . Boches are like that . . . they seem lost when they can't click heels—luckily for us. . . . So I was down to five hundred before I began to flatten out. She sung like a screech owl with the strain, but stood it like a bird . . . and there, right under my hand, was Bunny skimming on a long volplane to the sea. . . .

"I couldn't believe it. I thought it must be his ghost, for I remembered his face as he slid past. But it was Bunny right enough, bleedin' like a pig and grinning. . . .

"He grinned sideways when I got close, leaned over in a heap, and began to laugh, just like a girl, sir—half crying, you know. Then I saw it was dangerous and got my nose between his floats, shoved him over to Noord Hinder, and got him on board . . . After that—oh well!—we had to plug him and then I decided to start off to taxi home . . . couldn't very well stick it there, sir, in case a Hun came along. Bunny was in a mortal funk. He said we should be interned . . . couldn't risk that; so we scooted. . . ."

"Lucky for you our tracks coincided," the commander commented.

"*Rather!*"

"Ever done any taxi-ing before?"

"Once or twice, sir . . . only once to speak of."

"Where?"

"Zeebrugge to the Thames. . . . Why?"

"In half a gale of wind?" asked the commander.

"Well—it was blowing a bit. . . . Why, you weren't . . ." Peter gasped, again shy, it appeared.

"I saw you come in. Cold, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't warm, sir."

"Two men lying across your cab, half drowned, eh? Picked 'em off a wreck after a bit of torpedo

work, eh ? No risks taken . . . difficult to remember details. What ? Got your D.S.O. yet ? ”

Peter shook his head. He displayed quite suddenly a desire to go and see Bunny. He said Bunny always moped if he was left long alone. The commander made no comment. He looked at me and smiled. A moment later we were alone.

“ Birds,” said the commander. “ Did you notice his eyes ? They are all like that . . . after a few months. Distance, you know. No—I’m no good at that sort of thing. I want decks under my feet—steel if you like. . . . Did you notice what he said, by the way ? ”

“ Apropos ? ”

“ ‘ Bunny’s face had unnerved me,’ as he flashed past, you recollect, ‘ so I threw my hands up and let my machine sit on her tail . . .’—eight thousand feet up, mind, ‘ as though I was hit.’ Lord ! if that doesn’t get the boy his D.S.O., nothing will.”

The duty squad hissed smoothly over the calm sea, entered the jaws which screened our base, and came round to nuzzle the buoys precisely as though nothing had occurred. We hoisted flags and waved the semaphore for ten minutes ; then Bunny went ashore in a cot with Peter in close attendance.

We noticed as they left the side that they both were grinning, and I turned to hear the engineer-commander, quoting for my benefit :

“ ‘ La vie est vaine :
Un peu d’amour,
Un peu de haine . . .
Et puis—bon jour !

La vie est breve :
Un peu d’espoir,
Un peu de rêve.
Et puis—bon soir ! ’ ”

CHAPTER VI

THE ESCORT

Destroyers.—In the North Sea.—The Apotheosis of Chatter.—Dawn.

TWIN destroyers moved through the darkness heading to the east, and in a seaport far astern women who were girls in years returned from the cliffs, where for an hour they had strained eyes on watch—came back to wait and pray, to pray and knit.

There was a stunt on, that is all—one of the kind known to the Navy as a beef trip. It was summer, and the England we know clamouring for food. In the lands on the far side of the North Sea are spies who, when they score, as sometimes they do, carry fat purses to the fireside where women await their return; but never, whether they win or lose, do the sailors on whom they spy carry fat purses to those who await them. These men do not consider gold. They are concerned with a factor termed honour, which has nothing in common with gold, although sometimes honours are bought with gold.

In the summer men expect to see the sun even in that stretch of muddiness they term the North Sea; but the sun had gone down behind glum clouds at nine o'clock, and the half-light showed a dim horizon, perhaps a mile distant, damp, smudged, miserable to consider.

The escort commander acknowledged these factors with a shrug and concentrated his gaze on the beastliness they faced.

"North-east," said he, "with rain and spray enough to wash the Fleet."

A shadowy figure behind the screen made answer: "What price an armchair, sir, before the fire?"

"Some one in it, waiting for . . . ? Sorry," the commander interjected; "can't seem to remember *you* as a married man, Lindsay."

"Can't seem to remember it myself, sir. Didn't last long enough to get that sort of feeling. Ten days' leave, a week of life, then this. . . . Can't fancy I see myself selling that farm."

"Nor I. Seen the evening paper?"

"Not yet. . . . Any news, sir?"

"They say the war will be over by Christmas. That's the cream. . . ."

"Good! Who's the liar?"

The commander moved across and stared through a slit at the compass. He was silent—angry. Behind him stood a bluejacket nursing the wheel. Near at hand was a bunting-tosser, flags stowed, switch ready, Morse graven on his brain. The commander came near and said again: "Ask if they have seen the evening paper."

It seemed he had a mind to probe.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Immediately at the mast head a series of flashes appeared and from the next astern came an answering will-o'-the-wisp. Then the bunting-tosser, otherwise yeoman of signals, spelled out the query: "Have you seen the evening paper?"

"No," flicked through the dark with precision, followed by "Why?" Then: "What's the latest London whine?" as though in mimicry of the question put by No. 1.

"It's a London crow," said the light in long and short flashes to a commander's dictation. "It says

we shall be sitting down to dinner at peace with all men on Christmas Day."

"Name, name!" pleaded the light.

"J. B."

"*Floreat!*" winked from the next astern. "Good old liar."

The commander seemed impressed by this similarity of views. He moved up and down the small bridge assimilating the fact.

And as he marched, glaring into the night with each turn, a kindred sentence troubled him. "What is the Navy doing?" For a moment he halted, stung, then marched as before, up and down, down and up, considering, intent.

This thing annoyed. It had come to him in many guises—through the medium of letters and comment in the Press; by innuendo from lips arched sufficiently to lead Judas by the ears; from those who hurled straight questions which spoke of business considerations and refused to soften the blows. "What is the Navy doing? Why don't you give them socks? You are big enough and strong enough in all conscience. Surely there must be some way of digging them out as that First Lord of yours said. Why, then, don't you begin?"

He remembered, too, additional piffle all harping on the same string. "Get them out, or if you are incompetent, let those in who can. These raids must cease. They are breaking the nation's nerve."

Astonishment came to his aid here. He looked at the North Sea tumbling mistily in the gloom. There were one hundred and sixty-two * thousand square miles of it, and he occupied a space whence he could govern a circle one mile in diameter. Rather

* Authorities differ :

Murray gives 162,600 square miles ;

Krümmel gives 220,910 square miles.

futile, was it not, to talk of stopping all raids while, on the far side, behind the wet triangle were walls and mines, forts and an armed coast for the raiders' shelter. The thing at which they were to dig.

He came back to the allegations of these critics, as he termed them. Even the battle of Jutland was not sacred to them. They walked around it with a microscope tearing at the honour of those who had fallen. Jutland had been shorn of its glory by the stupidity of those who led our fleets, or by Admiralty instructions . . . or because some one a long way up lacked the Nelson touch. And he remembered that when the Nelson touch was in being its critics damned it, swore that any other sort of touch would have finished the French at the Nile, made victory of defeat at Copenhagen, and won at Trafalgar so that no enemy ship could have escaped.

He remembered, too, those more personal affronts which had come his way ; heard a soft voice deploring the fact that she really had never cared for him as she should, and thanking him for giving her freedom to return to the arms of khaki.

And because he was strong and big-hearted he said nothing of this either to his mother, sister or pal. But it rankled. Khaki, it appeared, was in the ascendant just now. Well, it was wise to recognise facts. And of course one must acknowledge that it was largely composed of that part of the nation which had refused to prepare for this raffle—he phrased it so in his mind—and therefore had left the Navy fettered, unable at the first spring to strike out.

Perhaps that was why he was bitter, why he joked with Lindsay about marriage and walked so frequently alone. He had been through Jutland, you understand, and knew just how much of this criticism was just. He had been in the North Sea ever since the

Cressy trio went up, and he knew how shore folk looked upon sailors when the wit was out.

"What is the Navy doing?" He flung back his answer through spray that strove to blind him: "Fighting for a people who were too damned lazy to prepare . . ."—then marched in silence a little ashamed.

A swell rolled down from the north in lumpy disarray—a sort of jumble-sale of discarded seas which flicked and spluttered with undirected zeal, leaped on board in the waist, and set the destroyer lurching. She was going all out, in the naval phrase, and trembling like a lap-dog facing the cold. The sea towered on either hand as she drove through it, broadened to a counter-wave, and fell breathless into the sizzling wake.

The Long Forties held this racing pair at an hour when it is seen at its best, or its worst, as you please. A destroyer can lie for a moment very easily on two of the waves it provides, with a vision of daylight peeping amidships beneath her. It builds up a sea which can break a ship's back, drop her engines on the sands, and leave two ends oscillating vicariously to the depths. Only the Dogger Bank or off Yarmouth in a north-easter can equal its virulence. It slops at the iron coast, slops at the ships which pass over it—brims upon them and seeks to carry men in its arms when it returns.

It is a shoal spot in a very malignant sea, untiring in its war on men and their cobbles. It rolls back upon itself, stung by the granite which stays it from a march across Scotland. It is very rarely still, and is part of the hunting-ground of those *unterseebooten* which obey the All-Highest—of Germany.

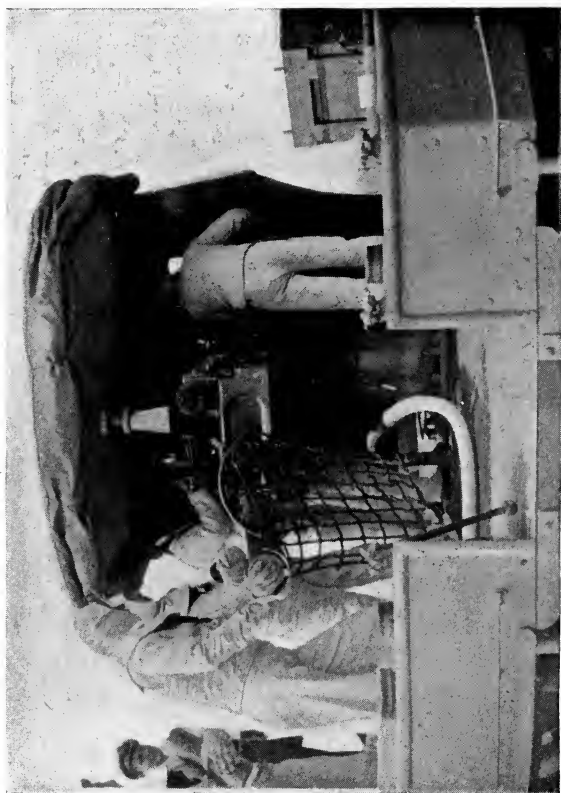
Mist it carries in its arms, sea-fret, rain, hail, snow, as the seasons ordain. And with them it shrouds

our coasts, blots out the lights, tinges the seascape with yellows and greens, wraps the horizon in steam, and wrecks the ships which move upon it. The commander had no words for his abhorrence of it. It was the last sea made. Late on Saturday night it was begun and left unfinished. The far side of it was so shallow that you could drive a coach and four up the coast from the *Maas* to Texel at low-water springs, damn till you were blue in the face and hand the ribbons to a numskull with perfect sangfroid.

Yet we fought to maintain our grip on it—fought for a nation which was blind to our deeds now, as before it had been blind to the methods of Germany. Well—that was part of the plot by which a world burdened with progeny was permitted to destroy those whom it was difficult to feed. . . . Those women were right. He saw it now. He remembered their smug attitude of content, dog-oddities posed silkily on laps which should have held babies.

Admiral So-and-So was a rotter . . . that was the term; and his wife was no better. The C.-in-C. deserved translation . . . while General So-and-So was as big a fool as Lord K., and God knows he was the last word in stupidity. They walked more gingerly with the Navy, perhaps because the commander was there to refute them. Yet they destroyed, for other listeners, all, from the First Lord to the last gazetted lieutenant. And they knew, cigarettes emphasised this; for were not their husbands members of His Majesty's Government, people who talked without closing doors? . . . and these women were but units, as the commander knew, of the tribe who babbled, criticised, and shrugged out the ineffable.

What was all this to the ears of a man stung by the preference shown for khaki by the woman he worshipped but an incentive to cavilling? It reflected



GUN CREW IN ACTION.



A QUESTION OF DAMAGES.

on the people he lived to defend. No soul of all the thousands in office but worked for himself, precisely as trade unionists worked for themselves and struck when the nation was cornered.

One should not be asked to fight for a nation one despised. One should be freed of an incubus. Yet it remained. It was an incentive to the last move of all harassed souls, whether by fate or by accident.

For a moment, as he stood facing the spray clouds, he rebelled, then a voice appealed, saying, somewhere at the back of things: "Surely you aren't going to be knocked out of your stride by a chit of a girl?" . . . A chit! . . . That gave him another point of view. He had scarcely considered her thus . . . and, said the voice, to join such blighters . . . God! they are the limit.

So! That was over. He could not have said to what this thought referred. The Celtic mind is more prone to introspection, perhaps, than the Saxon. It sees things from various angles, and all seem to impinge on the main question. Some men might pass over to internment; but he could not. It was not for nothing he had been trained at Osborne and Dartmouth; not for nothing he had worked at Whale Island with the *Vernon* and the rest. . . . Only a cad would go over and leave all those damned fools to fight their own battles in future . . . only a cad.

He crossed to the starboard wing and leaned over the screen to stare at the sea. It strove to whelm him as before, to brush him into the pit it had dug out there where immensity yawned, hissing its greeting.

In his eyes the sea suddenly appeared as a shallow incentive to evasion—an incentive prepared by the Almighty to keep men and nations at see-saw; a

tantalising bridgehead which an army might cross if you could dam it as they talked of damming Zuyder Zee. It was the worst ring in the world for a fight, hedged with shoals. One could never see two yards from one's nose. To navigate by observations was absurd; a man had to smell his way. Nelson beating against nor'-westerly gales in the Gulf of Lyons was in paradise by comparison with this still-born echo of a sea. And the Navy was slanged for not sweeping it clean. God! that annoyed.

But it would be held. He came back to that. Although it was not worth the lives of two British bluejackets, the All-Highest should never rule it. Rather would he, as commander, march the bridge as Vanderdecken marched the poop of his *Flying Dutchman*, live in oilskins till they grew to be part of him, wear sea-boots and fisherman's stockings and all the idiotic mufflers the British people wove for khaki, conduct beef trips till Kingdom come, than the Kaiser should crow at Cuxhaven of his sovereignty.

Seven bells! It was not struck, yet in his heart he knew the hour. The gale droned on. The darkness was of that character that the men dubbed like the inside of a drain. Submarines would scarcely bother them to-night. They would be looking after their own hides, not cavorting on the surface on the chance of a shot. Besides, the destroyer was going all out. In her engine-room there was a roar of imprisoned force; the hum of her turbines playing musically on his ears told him all he need know.

"A north-easter, by George! One of the blighters. Wonder what it is like in Edinburgh!"

A picture of Princes Street on Saturday night arose before him; the portico of the North-Eastern Hotel. He saw the fur-clad women lounging there in chairs and beside them khaki, gorget-patched, eye-

glasses, untouched by the war. He heard the ripple of their laughter, remembered the seven-course dinner they had enjoyed, the wine, coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes they had consumed. And he made shift to get hold of this convoy, to find them more "beef."

Then, far back at the end of his last leave, he remembered the room where she had said just what she had said. It was a beautiful room, artistic, rose-tinted, semi-dark. She lay, her face turned to the pillow of a sofa, her shoulders shaking. He reached out and touched her head, and she instantly flung back her hand: "No—no! Not that. I don't deserve it." There followed a deeper note. "All I ask is that you should be happy—pray God that may be possible."

He made a long pause on this.

In reality he was searching the heart of a gale; in thought, with the facility of one accustomed to the silences, he was watching this girl, reading her, remembering her words. The dual capacity caused no strain. It was the half-uttered sentences which found that. It appeared that khaki was a more artistic colour than his crude blue and gold. "Paltry!" The word escaped him, and he looked across the bridge to where a dim shadow outlined Lindsay with raised binoculars. He moved over to join him.

"See anything?" he asked.

"No, sir. Imagination only." He lowered his glasses.

"We can do without that, here, Lindsay—what?"

"*Rather*. But I would sooner be here than ashore where they are."

He spoke of more than one, not knowing what had transpired in the room in town.

“ Yes—why ? ”

“ Oh, well ; you see, sir, that we at any rate are doing things, while they ”—he halted, uncertain how to put it—“ have to sit still and guess. That must be ghastly.”

The commander frowned over this. It was a factor which had escaped him.

“ Yes,” he said at length. “ Perhaps you are right. Anyhow, it explains the damned bad shooting they make.”

He turned and walked towards the chartroom.

“ Over by Christmas ! ” he growled. “ Good Lord ! ”

He exchanged signals with his next astern and went to look at his chart.

A messenger intercepted him, handed a paper, and stood back. The commander switched on a light and closed the door.

It was a message from the wireless room explaining in the terse language of the sea that patrol *X. J. 2*, far up the Little Fisher Bank, had caught sight of two cruisers steering N.W., true, and lost them in the dirt. He had advised C.-in-C. Position would take them into neighbourhood of T. 5 before daylight at twenty-seven knots.

The commander read it. His lips were closed, his eyes steadfast. He called the messenger and said, “ Tell Mr. Escott to get on to the Admiral and report,” acknowledged his salute, and turned to the chart.

A few measurements gave the destroyer’s position. With compasses extended thence to T. 5 he measured on the scale.

“ At two o’clock,” escaped his lips. Then after a pause, “ Can do . . . if the convoy is ready.”

True. And thereafter an escort would be tied to

the speed of the slowest ship of the convoy. Perhaps eight knots.

Well—the Navy would save oil and the people would have more spare cash for the cinemas.

So the world wags.

Three a.m. . A scattered array of cargo-boats flaunting neutrality, wallowing perhaps to the stars; two British destroyers to act as herald. An hour late at the start, a faint line already touching the horizon out there where the wind boomed. Dark still, blowing still; wet, mist, spray joining hands in the murk. A man who would stay at sea when it was possible to wash hogs on shore must be a glutton for discomfort—yet these boys of the ward-room and lower deck made light of it. When a sea catches a man, rolls over him and wets him to the skin, he damns the sea; but he does not eschew it. He gets a cup of hot cocoa, if he is lucky, drinks, smokes, and chatters out shibboleths about that farm which is not his to sell.

In spite of oilskins every one was wet. Oilskins do not keep out sea-water, rain and the rest; they keep it in when you are brimmed. Gradually you warm it—as you do the wet linen of a pack * when the blankets are about you. A man who would remain dry at sea in a destroyer, or one of the patrol-boats, needs isinglass worn bladder-wise, hermetically sealed with a drawstring. This would put his eyes, ears, hands and feet out of action—and he would not be able to smoke. On the whole sailors prefer to get wet, and rounding up a convoy gives opportunity even to the stokers.

A convoy which speaks a dozen languages ashore speaks but one at sea—otherwise it would never be

* The medical, not the military, type.

rounded up. On this occasion it was a lumbering tank of a boat which answered to a Swedish variant of the "Dutchman" *lingua* which gave all the trouble. She persisted in using her blinker when every one else was at peace. She wanted to know, in long and short flashes from a singularly powerful lamp, how she was to steer, when she was to get in, whether her cargo, which was pitprops, was required in France or Italy; and on each occasion the commander silenced her. Then she lost her station, and blinked out the fact till next astern boarded her and put the lamp out of action. It was then that the last of the escort's bluejackets got wet. And it was then that the lieutenant who boarded her discovered she was a thirteenth ship in a convoy supposed to contain twelve. She explained quite glibly that she had intended to run the gauntlet alone, but had been advised by wireless from Carlskrona to fall in with the rest. Hence, doubtless, the ignorance of the British Admiralty of her movements. Her papers seemed to bear out these statements, so the lieutenant signalled, damned, and got back to his boat. After that, for an hour there was peace.

The opportunity for which, in some moments of stress, the commander had prayed was at hand, but he did not know it. Who of us, ashore or afloat, in these days would pray for prescience in a matter which stands with the Most High for direction. The Zaza's and Magda's of great London are in no sort of doubt as to their part in divination; they pander simply to the gulls and the gulls whimper when they are plucked, calling on the Law—which is as it should be in a world made rich by the manufacture of H.E. shells.

A commander is not one of those who manufacture

shells. He orders their use and in times of stress fires them. He was therefore scarcely likely, in spite of his ancestry, to encourage the soothsayers when facing a north-easter, or when running away from it, with a wireless in hand bidding him alter his course. The factor of this additional ship did not seem to call for examination beyond that already accorded to it. The thing had happened before. It was a beast of a night for boating, darker now, if possible, than an hour ago, and there was this matter of the cruisers to consider. It was agreed that an eye should be kept on the interloper; that was all.

Lindsay again on watch at four o'clock rather questioned the reliability of that report from patrol-boat *X. J. 2*. Her commander, it appeared, was one of the Curly Gang,* keen, but new to the job. He wondered. Perhaps he had seen snakes in the dirt. Of course one could never be sure. The thing to do was to keep their eyes skinned and leave the rest to Joss.

A wireless in a strange tongue intervened to bother the commander here—not because it was impossible to pick one up, but because it was strong. Its meaning was sought in every known code, and in some that were not, its probable source considered. Guesswork made way when all else failed, and that, too, was presently discarded. The words were German, but they had no plain sequence, and the wireless-room had no means of decoding them.

Difficulty, you perceive, in spite of comment, remains a factor on the high seas as elsewhere; espionage a factor even more illusive.

So the thing moved to completion, Lindsay on watch once more; the commander having been up

* R.N.R.

all night, as befitted his supremacy, still footing his small bridge; the engineer-commander nursing his engines, husbanding oil—the British nation comfortably abed.

Next astern was now no longer next astern. Sometimes he circled at full speed round the convoy, sometimes passed into the shades astern to bring up the rear. Dark still, blowing as before; rain, mist, and tumbling seas to right and to left of them, the escort wallowing: then out of the blackness a glare appeared, far over in the east where some day the sun would rise. It stood for thirty seconds perhaps straight in the wind's eye—a flare, not of the sun but of a funnel, twin funnels; then a squall rushed over them, blotting it out.

Next astern spotted it and flashed the intelligence to his chief. He, too, had seen it, and in his mind the thing was clear—cruisers. Word came back for action stations as the leader circled swiftly from the van. "Convoy at full speed, scatter!" ran his message as he passed, while the wireless tapped out details which should intercept those two who came hell for leather to his aid and turn them to the south in order to crack nuts which it would be impossible to crack here. To the wet triangle, he seemed to say; meanwhile whack her up and hard-a-starboard!

The destroyer flared, ruffled by a following sea. For a minute she seemed to stand on end, her funnels belching sparks, then slobbered into stride while next astern fell into his. Independent action was the word, and, as the two moved in line, next astern heard his leader's comment on the fact that now the convoy seemed to lack the thirteenth ship. Was he quite sure of his facts? In any case only twelve ships moved to their orders. And there came the blatter of a chief yeoman—"Fritz for a

dollar, sir," and over his shoulder to the man at the wheel, "Fritz, or I'll eat my best gell out of home."

It did not occur to this commentator to explain that the omens were against any meetings whatever but the one they faced; yet at that moment his commander was giving the challenge which should determine the nature of the flare they had seen.

All funnels shoot flames on occasion, even under the greatest precaution, when a vessel is driven; all friendly ships acknowledge the challenge when it is given—yet now the signal remained unanswered. The gun crews had no doubt—they made ready. The commander had no doubt—he headed for the flare. The seas smoked past.

Twin destroyers steered now in column of line ahead to the eastward sampling the salt seas. Behind them, scattering like a flock of pigeons, the convoy churned along at what is called full speed. West, south, north they drove, laying off courses for a future assembling, noting the log, punctilious of effort for the sake of destroyers already out of sight. These drove into a sea which leaped them at a bound, raining spray on their taffrails. In black darkness, in the teeth of a gale, they moved onward, leaping like hounds in a gorse patch, and suddenly were lighted from stem to stern; their grim attitude, guns, shields, crews, bridge all picked out in the glare of a white light. And with that light came a new rain—a rain which spat fire, iron in jagged slips, bullets, gases, upon them from lips so near that none could miss, which blinded men, flung them out in red patches upon the sea; smashed guns and shields all in a tornado of red force that silenced the wind roar and tamed the sea.

Instantly the leading destroyer flashed out his intent, swerved, and became the centre of a sheet

of flame. Guns flared on all hands—a diapason note upon a background of rattle. The first boomed, the second ground out the notes of a pneumatic riveter running spasmodically. Spray curved high, flame lit, the sea leaped in columns which towered geyser-like, hissing. The leader was the centre of it, her path a zig-zag of pitted whiteness, going all out for her big antagonist. Her commander no longer stood, nor did he sleep, but sat in a bunch giving orders while one stooped over him binding his stumps. Blood on the bridge, blood in the waist, blood spattered and clogged for the seas to sweep clean ; gunners at rest, torpedo-men who would launch mouldies no more ; so they charged to get near, swerved and let fly.

The first missed. A second followed, in spite of failure, and found its mark in obscurity, far off where fire leaped and a dull roar came down the gale. In a pause which seemed tremendous no gun spoke. The crews stood watching. Some one cheered—a dull shout broken by swift vengeance as shells rained fast. Whether the sea was hell or the fire hell none could have said ; they faced both wilting, impotent—faced it without flinching, barking, angry, flame their message, till those who were left went up with their ship, flung thither by the breath of their own magazine.

Next astern saw her go, yet he scarcely swerved as he crossed her track. Cheers rang out even as they would on victory. The commander waved his cap leading it, knowing well that he, too, would be wiped out. The men shouted, cognisant, if men in action can think, that presently they too would be flayed.

The shells they received were from nine-inch guns.

They replied with sixes. You can make no mistake at close range in these circumstances—the lesser armament fails. Well—but Fritz should have a good run for his money. Apparently there were two, each big enough to scoff the grim hound which flew at them. So much searchlights had shown—the rest was guesswork; but next astern was equipped, like her leader, with mouldies itching for a run, men itching to start them in the time-honoured fashion of our marvellous Navy.

Two swift cruisers faced this small hound of the sea which had seen a companion hound caught and flung piecemeal to people God's Heaven; but that did not stay her. It bared her teeth. Her lips rucked back upon gums which snarled. She came with a rush as methodic, as well aimed, as if the grey hulls she charged were built of the butter and eggs of the scattered convoy, with sides no thicker than the plates of that Swedish snake which had crept among them, signalled the position, and escaped tongue in cheek the winner of a purse.

She spat flame as she rushed; but she had no intention of ramming. She sought to get under the big-guns line of greatest depression—to face his cracklers, whatever force he could fling, and get to work with her mouldies. One went home, or so, in the turmoil, it seemed. Then the great ship limped in her stride, came round to the north and her consort was free to use pressure.

The end came swiftly while next astern was tapping out hieroglyphics to certain lean cruisers of the southern pack, who rushed to her aid. It came in the flair of action—guns roaring, machines spitting, flame pouring from wrecked funnels. It came in the old way, but in the swift fashion of to-day—every man at his post or dead; engines racing, stokers

watching through mica screens the play of oil in the furnaces ; engineers steadfast on platforms watching the telegraphs, the tubes, thrusting in buttons, pulling at levers, as though, in all the world, only the question of revolutions mattered.

It came with a snotty in charge, the bridge a shambles, a wounded yeoman at the wheel, the guns wrecked. A great flash of light heralded it—yellow, green, pink—wonderful to behold, and through its glow masses of iron and steel leaped up, aiming at the stars, wavered, came back upon the sea, pattering.

And when the light was gone there remained stray dots pulsing upon the sea which carried them.

So night fell upon the escort which attended the slow march of provisions to England—night and silence.

So came a new heralding of shapes before the throne of Most High God. The dawn of a new life for some . . . a little shortening of supplies for those who still gorge.

CHAPTER VII

SURSUM CORDA

The Eyes of the Fleet.—A Cruiser engaged.

Prince Bismarck said to me in 1889: "If the British Fleet is overwhelmingly strong it becomes the dominant factor for peace in Europe."—LORD BERESFORD.

LONG grey hull, wedge-shaped, falling away aft, boasting four funnels and two attenuated masts with a bridge lifted halfway to her fighting-top—that is a typical cruiser. Her guns lean out nosing the sea over bow and stern, her bulwarks are rails; her casings, boats, barbettes, Q.F.'s, tubes and a thousand obstructions crowding decks are part of her, rigid iron and steel, and she stands to the Navy of to-day as the frigate in Nelson's time stood for battleships of the Line.

But they move with speed and certainty for equipment. Wind, weather, and sea have but little influence on these warrior greyhounds which watch our shores. It may make them wetter, make positive superlative, make men swear and pray as the case fits—that is all. They are knife-like in their structure, lean in the flanks as their prototype of the chase, and of enormous energy when measured in horse-power. In a seaway they are no more comfortable than a racing-yacht close hauled in a breeze. You live in a bath, and there is no steam geyser to warm the shower when it falls. "She ships it blue and she ships it neat" is a very fair description of the thing in being.

Rather different to the old days when frigates carried messages and searched out enemy formations for the fleet. Then you would walk the quarter-deck in pumps and remain dry ; now there is no quarter-deck worth the name, and pumps would be like wash-leather in an hour. A cruiser lies as near the water as the frigates stood over it with their copper in a breeze ; but she can turn on her heel like a skater at full tilt, and speak to her friends through leagues of ether with a certainty that would leave the old-time sailor agape.

They are the lineal descendants of the vessels one used to meet in all parts of the world, watch as they hoisted their ensigns at eight bells, wait for when at sunset the flags were hauled down, try to follow when the chief yeoman was busy with his signals. They are of that race of ships which came into distant harbours, took up an anchorage, hoisted a flag and instantly commenced a salute. Sometimes other warships were in the port, and then, for an hour or so, one watched the tongues which leaped red from alternate sides as fresh colours went up and the guns paid homage.

Then for days or weeks we took our fill of them, noted the precision of their top hamper, watched the bo'sun as he went out in a cutter to square their yards, worshipped the clean, white beauty of their sides, the brass and ornamentation on bow and stern, watched the launches, the gigs and cutters, and ached to be of those who walked their decks.

They were the outposts of an island nation ; vessels come sometimes to exact reparation for acts of savagery committed by barbaric tribes—the plenipotentiaries of the sovereign of the seas and a tangible assurance that England would do her duty ; but now they are grey as the seas which

beckon them hence, carry them and sometimes hide them.

Cruisers have varied duties, some of them pleasant, some unpleasant—all of them difficult. They are the eyes of the fleet and are accustomed to hold themselves in readiness for any adventure; to carry through the pacts of empire, guard the ocean highways where on vastly divergent tracks merchant ships pass and repass bringing wealth and greatness to the nation. They may be dispatched to the gates of the sun or to face the blasts of arctic winter; may be called upon to round up enemy cohorts or to draw battle squadrons into action; may go out with bands playing, as to a dance, and face death in the blare of a gale.

Without question, without argument, at the ordering of a string of flags or a whisper in wireless, they move away from their base to face the dangers of modern sea war at its worst—seas strewn with mines, craft which creep in its depths, carrying perhaps the stink-pots of an enemy placed surreptitiously below deck—in any weather, at any hour, so the men who man them pass from our midst and sometimes enter Valhalla in passing.

Valhalla, palace of immortality for the souls of heroes slain in battle, stands for all men to enter.

If they be fit, its gates fall open to their summons; if they be unfit, its gates remain closed. That is the law of the ancient Northland races as sung by the sagamen of the past, and we who follow walk reverently with lifted hearts.

“ The sting of a blow is on our faces,
The soul of a man is in our keeping,
The Trust of a Nation is at our feet,
And he who was strong is strong no more . . .

“ But the thud of guns and tramp of armies
Shakes the land as we sleep, and the Heavens
Are dark with tears. Yet there remains for those
Who are sere as for those who march, the still
Voice of Faith . . .

“ ‘ Lord ! I believe,
Help Thou mine unbelief.’ ”

Through the grey air in the manner of vikings, over the grey sea they loved, domed by the grey clouds which sometimes screened them, moved three shapes, brushing a path in the wilderness.

They emerged slowly from a smoke cloud which for an hour had formed their screen behind Pentland, a triplet from the fleets of Britain, dipping to the swell which ran white-lipped to greet them.

A cruiser and her escort moved there pushing into the teeth of a rising gale, facing dim heavens which masked the westering sun.

Heavy grey clouds, with a scud streaming thinly, like smoke, across them, confronted this trio ; heavy grey seas which rose in black shapes, solid and menacing, to honour the English War-Lord, at whose voice millions of his race had awaked, taken arms, and gone out to fight for freedom, justice, honour.

No other man could have called forth so spontaneous an answer, no other could have imbued men with the confidence necessary for so vast an adventure—only that English War-Lord who now voyaged to the stars . . . Kitchener, “ K. of K.,” as the world called him ; the cold, stern soldier of the chatterers, whose iron face and will was imprinted on the nation’s mind, in spite of malice, so that nothing could shake its trust.

And now he sailed in the Navy’s keeping. Sailed at the King’s order, a staff of great men his com-

panions, to greet the Tzar of all the Russias and forward the national business.

The *Hampshire* dipped to a sea and spray flew on either bow, rainbow-tinted where light touched it, grey where there was none. For a moment she seemed to pause, scumbled by the flurry of the wilderness; then again her grim sides showed their tint—the war tint of a nation at grips with death; the grey-black of the Fleet which holds it scatheless.

She matched in tone the Atlantic rollers, even as a while since she had matched the North Sea spate. She was grey with their dim greyness, cold as the shallow wastes where for months she had cruised. The fog of those drear seas was the standard she aped. To be like them, to match the smoke, the mist of her habitat, the aim of her people.

She moved with the conscious dignity of strength and ordered force—power in her stride. The muzzles of her guns, pointed for offence, leaned out grimly nosing the murk. The smoke from her funnels streamed back upon her wake, leaving a cloud as of the cuttlefish blurring his trail.

High over the bridge screens the wind sang a whistling chant in the greyness; and the delicate antennæ, which are a ship's ears, twirled and vibrated between tall masts.

On either hand the twin black imps who were her companions belched smoke and cut capers which scoffed at the dry laws of gravitation. Sometimes they soared as though, like a seaplane, they pricked for the stars; at others the sea swallowed them to the tips of their funnels, and only the inkiness of their breath remained.

In the Service the imps are known as T.B.D.'s, torpedo-boat destroyers, and they move, like the porpoise or grampus, at full tilt when on business.

Sometimes they catch a submarine and crumple him up with a spitting fury of gunfire; sometimes give him the stem, and nothing remains to mark his exit but a weightier stretch of water, a space wherein seas no longer break.

So the trio danced onward, emerging from Pentland, and came towards the iron coast of the islands.

All the land is iron-bound here, all the islands pinnacles of a worn continent whence the sea has washed the softer terrain. As the giant rollers of South Pacific have torn Patagonia, jagged it, and pieced the sea with a thousand islands, so the Atlantic's surge has brashed the Scottish coast line, leaving rock and islets, pinnacle and shoal in labyrinthine profusion as outposts for the land.

A wild coast—wild as the fjords, wild as western Magellan and the interlocked islands of Patagonia. Cold, grey, iron-bound, all of it, upon which seas roll their thunders. A coast harried by gales, where fishermen live precariously, fighting to win sustenance from the sea, where the sun is oftener cold than warm, oftener screened than clear.

Two bells! Seven o'clock, and a bugle calling the watch to secure a raft which the sea had mauled. A wild night on the horizon. A wild coast a-lee, as our fathers have sung. A gale humming melodiously its requiem, as is the way with gales, on declining day. The sun blaring red and blurred upon turrets and bastion of sea and sky. A flame picture wonderful to consider—the last to shine on men voyaging to Valhalla; the ship lighted by it, the air luminous, the purple seas flecked because of it.

Then came the northern twilight—all its magic burked by swift clouds from the wrathful west; the curtain of sea and sky which draws upon a gale. And

in the smother it was seen that the escort suffered, that to prolong its stay would bring disaster—so from the centre shape went a message to the imps.

“Go home!” it said in the language of the sea; “you will be getting your socks wet. Go home and keep the fires warm.”

The imps flicked a reply. In their minds they argued that the chief knew his business, that submarines would have no chance in a night of this sort. They would be pumping like a balloon tethered in a gale . . . couldn't get a shot in once a week! “Go home? Rather!”

They turned in a sea which smothered them, climbed its back, and the cruiser moved alone.

Majestic, fearless. A grey shape that stole on in the growing dusk. A figment of steel and Bessemer, tie and girder, rod and joist. A ship less in the semblance of a ship than of a wedge. One of less power than those leviathans who fought beside her at Jutland; but fast, trustworthy, staunch. A twelve-inch salvo, if it hit her squarely, would put her out of action, perhaps in a smother of red flame, instant, tremendous; but the sea she looked upon as a locomotive looks upon its track. The sea, she was ready to assert, had less mobility than the iron road which carries a train; but it is durable. It never requires repair. Its bridges never break down. It is there if you would test it—strong, cold, full of movement, full of surprises, but immutable.

For twenty odd months of war this cruiser had gone her way as ordered. She had endured the peril and uncertainty of an endless pause; had passed from sea to sea, from port to port, scouted; faced the bitter winter of that vicious puddle misnamed the North Sea; fought somewhere in the thunders

of the Battle of Jutland and emerged, as just now she emerged from Pentland, certain of her ability to face the odds which were set her.

Dangers too subtle for analysis lay in her path now as from the first mad onrush of war. Death from mines scattered broadcast, from submarines lurking where the gods knew, from conspiracy all the devilry of an enemy berserk and twisting in the toils—how should she consider the grim pinnacles of those islands she passed? They were shadows merely, shadows over which the scud drove, impossible of offence; yet, in spite of all, ashore as well as afloat, there were sinister forebodings, the claptrap perhaps of ignorance, and the jubilation of those who knew.

K. of K. was the central figure here and there. "What wouldn't the Sausages give to down 'im?" asked the lower deck. "Is there any blighter 'ere as will give the lie to that?" Apparently there was none. So with those far off. If there were a secret, that secret was kept. If there were conspiracy, those of the lower deck who spoke were no party to it. British seamen these, not Huns. Ready to grouse if you will, but clean of hand, as is inevitable while the white ensign flies and the seas remain free.

K. of K. ! The War-Lord of England would have given his ears to hear that talk; but his greatness kept it from him.

For half a lifetime he had dominated men's thoughts and speech by the personality which was his. The sphinx might divine what man would say, but he would not clothe it in words. The known "austerity of his glance," the "steely blue eyes," kept subordinates at a distance and truth in the background. There were those who talked, of course. Enemies, some, who reeled off anathema on all the sphinx could do or say. Others, doubtless, who defended.

What matter? Is it not always so? Deep in the heart of all great men is an inner consciousness, even as with you or me. It is perhaps more kept in control. Certainly it finds no place in expression. And to the machinations of an enemy those who would enter Valhalla remain indifferent.

Night flared over him, seeking, as always, to push him out of his stride. Wind and sea were conspired to drive him below; yet for the most part he kept the deck. A gale blared over the grey shape which carried him, seas rolled upon her, aimed to blot her out—to drive her, as it had driven others, on those dim island pinnacles she skirted. The gale grew, as it were, with the knowledge of its impotence. It slammed at the rollers, whitening their crests; sent black hills across the night, down which trailed luminous splotches, dull fires of marvellous quality—streaks, spots, as though the hill were stable. And in an instant they were gone, the hill became a hollow, and all its ravening parts aswirl upon the cruiser's plates.

She moved through the bluster scatheless—cold, stern, indomitable as that Lord she carried, screened from the driving seas by her shield. She was pointed for the north. She would see the gates of the Arctic, breathe the breath of the white tracts which stretch away and away to the confines of the world—to the great white soul of winter, there by the pole.

She would hold speech with consorts who were invisible as the Norns brooding over her; receive messages from a chief whose orders she obeyed; speak with Admiralty itself, domiciled in that great London where cabs swirled in the murk and theatres no longer blazed wanton light on the crowds who passed. She would never be alone. Voices would reach her as from the spirit world passing inscrutably

with stabs of flame. Even the King, if he so willed it, could speak with her, advise, warn, cheer her.

And always in her long passage through the wilderness she would be in touch with war—the war which now it was her business to avoid, but which stood arrayed, as always, to strike her down. Steel against steel, flame against flame; by ramming, by gunfire, by scorpion blows delivered under sea, by stealth from within—so might come, at any moment, her end, giving her over to Valhalla, the palace of immortality.

She lifted in a whirl of spray, unconscious of Valhalla as he for whose guerdon she strove, and again came bell-strokes, given, as the fashion is on shipboard, twice staccato, once again, after a pause. Three bells, half-past seven! She took no heed of it, nor of the chanty which for a moment of time escaped the men's quarters.

She was master of her destiny here as in other seas. Her beams and girders thrummed their unending song, challenging the gale. Her engines purred an accompanying bass. Shovels rattled, winches whirled, down there in the hot heart of the ship where men worked stripped to the waist, sweating, their torso shining and grimed in streaks with the essence of her power. Did they not carry Britain's War-Lord—the soldier who magically had raised and equipped an army of millions while other folk trailed blather? The sailors knew him. The black squad knew. The officers marching the bridge knew. Doubts assailed them less than the knowledge that it must be uncomfortable for him. For the sterile attitude of sub-acid criticism they had no words. He was their guest, their over-lord. A man known in the world as K. of K.

For the honour of their errand stokers worked

where weaklings would die. For the honour and the danger and the glory of their errand they would work double tides if he so willed it. As their comrades on deck went their way in a bath of iced spray, so down here others toiled in a bath of sweat—watched levers and valves, brasses and giant rods which never were still, which did human tasks with barbarian force, clanging out chords. They stood cheek by jowl with cranks which revolved, marked the eccentricities swerve, the sway and poise of the whole . . . because, in fine, the word had gone forth to carry on.

They were bound on a journey so secret that all the world prattled of it, so dangerous that a presage grew. The man in the street, it appeared, had definite information of the quality of those passengers long before the cruiser received them . . . K. of K. ! How the world bleated.

Clubs and dinner-tables in London and elsewhere rattled with talk of him and his journey. They criticised him and it, questioning with an air of immense wisdom the value either of him or it. The great Kitchener, forsooth ! The man whom the Hun loved best—who was tired, effete. . . .

Those of our enemies still in our midst joked of the secrecy we maintained in all matters of national moment. They chattered tongue in cheek.

And now that the Navy had charge of him all the world had knowledge of his ship. She faced a gale with high seas, blackness and the devilry of the blustering north. K. of K. had been seen to smile. He was an old voyager. What was a gale but wind ? Clean to the taste though, clean and without subterfuge or quibble, or any of the smug posturings of those who, perhaps, would advise. He was seen at length to enter the captain's cabin—the holy of holies on all ships both great and small.

The sentry could have told when he passed the threshold; perchance given a hint of the manner of his approach—and exit; but Valhalla holds him too.

For there came quite suddenly a vivid flash, a resounding roar, and instantly the doors of Valhalla stood open to all.

Silence fell on that racing cruiser. The voice of the machine was hushed on her hurts. To some extent there was the wondrous quiet which lies at the heart of a cyclone. The engines no longer moved—only the tumble of the sea, the drone of a gale, were evident. Men rushed together awaiting the orders which presently would hint at the meaning of that crash.

Would it be action stations and the glory of a fight? Had Fritz got through—had they stumbled on a mine . . . or would it be the humdrum tale of boat or fire stations—drill; the last word in harassment for men honestly perfect?

Who knows?

Not those who stood there listening, expectant. Not K. of K., still within the captain's room. Only the officer of the watch knew, and his order went forth, arresting guesswork.

A bugle sang for boat stations—boat stations where boats would remain unlowered.

There came a sound from below more explanatory than this which was honestly conundrum, and the men trooped to quarters on a ship which already hummed under them. From aft, climbing the hatchway, came, with a word of command, two of those who rule.

“Way for Lord Kitchener there!” And the men saw pass them twin figures of Britain's latter-day worship—one clad in khaki, the other in blue. They

watched these two until he who wore khaki reached the quarter-deck.

Thereafter two khaki-clad figures seemed to pass up and down the sloped decks together.

The men moved away to release rafts, to unlash boats, to take their stations as for drill. Some occupied places in boats which would remain in their cradles until stirred by sheer inclination; others found spars, lifebuoys; blew up waistcoats and pretended it was funny.

The cruiser quailed under them.

Without doubt this thing that had happened was fatal. Presently the vessel would throw up her heels and they who waited expectant would have to swim for it. Uncomfortable, that. Cold. . . .

A bugle blared orders which the gale strove to drown. It was piping up once more! What was it they said? A drift of talk whelmed them. There would be a devil of a sea over there on the island! All rocks, by Jove! Luck, eh?

"Wish I was at the back of Portsmouth!" came thoughtfully from hirsute lips. "Wish you 'ad me by the bloomin' scruff, mate!" leaped in rejoinder.

And Valhalla stood wide to them awaiting the Pale One's sweep.

K. of K. walked slowly before them. Up and down, down and up, a khaki-clad figure on whom the Empire still leaned, cold, unresponsive, a little tired of the hurly-burly. He continued to walk. His arm was linked within his friend's—was that his wont?

K. of K., the men called him, worshipping and critical in a breath: the man who emerged once in

the Soudan disguised as a dervish to answer the challenge of an astonished sentry. The man who had built by slow degrees the blow which finished the Mahdi at Omdurman. The man who had block-housed the Transvaal and compelled the Treaty of Vereeniging ; who had fashioned India's army anew ; ruled Egypt ; and lastly built up a force which presently he would slip on the Huns as hounds are slipped upon their quarry. The man, it was whispered, who looked with love, at length, upon the home he was fashioning back there at the edge of Barham Down, amidst the giant trees of the rolling Kentish uplands, and stole odd moments to visit it as others would a mistress.

He marched there before them calmly, up and down, down and up, as if he were again on sentry go and must.

There came a sudden lurch flinging men down like apples shaken from a tree. They crashed across the deck, scrambled to their feet and stood waiting. Lord K., it seemed, stood also.

But they knew that their hour had come. They knew the strange trembling that had touched their ship. They were prepared by long service for assault and battery. They knew the writing on the wall, and would go out toeing the line in face of it.

The gale took them at their word and sent a sea which brimmed to the gun-shields. The ship rolled back in the teeth of it, her fangs buried, her bilge lifted to the black night. To the drum of the gale, to the pall which descended upon her, so she dipped to the majesty of her end.

Thus passed Kitchener on the road to Valhalla.

God saw his work was done, heard the prattlers, and, pitying, called him.

Valhalla holds him. Kkaki-clad he lies within the walls of steel which were his shield . . . even as they are the shield of all those who heard and obeyed his call.

CHAPTER VIII

PRO PATRIA

The Prelude.—The “Cherrypicker.”—Service in the North Sea.—The Real Thing.

I

REGGY SINDEN, Lieutenant-Commander, R.N., called himself a “dug-out,” which was a misnomer for one so young.

On August the 2nd, 1914, he was the owner of an estancia at the foot of Cordillera, in the province of Mendoza, Argentina; but September the 10th found him standing before a door at Whitehall which bore the following legend—

“Don’t knock. Come in.
Take your hat off on entering.
If you cannot take your hat off,
Stay outside.”

Reggy Sinden entered smiling. He knew the Navy and its methods, knew to whom this order was addressed, and passed up the long room uncovered.

“Well?” said the Chief as they shook hands.
“What have they given you?”

“Submarine service, sir, again. I’m appointed to E 01, commissioning Sheerness.”

“But I thought you came out because of your eyes?”

“Oh, that’s all right. Argentina cured me. . . . Seem short of men for undersea craft—trained men,” he explained; “and so I’m fixed up . . . join at once and get into shape.”

The Chief watched him with critical eyes—

“Didn’t you press for surface work? . . . I happen to know they want ’em as badly as we want most things.”

“It was the training that did it. . . . You can’t make submarine men in ten days; they put it quite fairly, and I couldn’t refuse—now. It was different when I came out of the Service. War a long way off then. No occasion to eat your heart out, although it was a bit of a wrench to cut the hawser, even then.”

“Of course. . . . Well, what about the ranch?”

“Sold.”

“Break-up price, eh?”

Sinden nodded.

“Couldn’t very well stick out for *plata* these days, sir . . . besides, land’s down.”

“Everything’s down but the flag, eh? Good Lord! Some of you over-seas men are paying for our slackers. Navy’s tied to the British apron-strings just when it requires absolute freedom . . . the old jorum . . . got your gear?”

“Everything. I join to-night. Trials to-morrow. After that *quien sabe?* North Sea, perhaps . . .”

The Chief held out his hand. “She’s a fine boat—the last word from our yards so far . . . take care of yourself and good hunting! So long!”

At four o’clock that afternoon Lieutenant-Commander Reggy Sinden stood on the deck of his boat. Beside him were a commander and Barry Larne, otherwise P. & O., a newly-joined member of the Curly Gang, who would be known as the navigator when his other sobriquet failed.

They were going the rounds, the commander, who would leave her in Sinden’s hands on the expiration of her trials, explaining to the new man the various points in submarine construction.

"No," he said, "there are no airlocks in British submarines. The whole top-side is an airlock, as you will find if she's holed and you get out of the hatch. . . . You see the air naturally rises when water enters, and there is only one way of escape—that is by the conning-tower. . . .

"Nor do we use helmets—they are served out; but as a matter of experience we know it is extremely difficult to escape from a vessel that has been properly holed. It is all chance, Joss, you know . . . we haven't time to bother about it. Been in the Adriatic at all?"

"Not lately, sir. . . . My route has been London, Suez, Colombo, China for the past two years—*Rome* and *Carthage* most of the time."

"Ah!—damned fine ships. Rather different here as far as space is concerned, eh? Navigator on the *Rome*?"

"Yes—afterwards chief of the *Carthage*."

"I know her . . . Marsden in command. Good fellow, Marsden. . . . But about the Adriatic; I have a notion we shall be sending round there, or even farther east, presently, when Italy declares her war aims, eh? And you boys will have to mind your eye. . . .

"To begin with, it's blazing hot—when it isn't wickedly cold, blowing a mistral or a trans-montana, or something wet like a sirroe. It'll be an unhealthy station for submarines. Airmen top dog all the time. You won't be able to move among the islands, as a rule, without being spotted from aloft. Then they will come down and drop bombs which may or may not hit you, and you will be inclined to burrow. That's the limit. Don't try it. You are no more hidden in the shallows when you are down than what you are on the surface. Keep moving. It's

your only chance. Turn on the gramophone and pretend to listen to Harry Lauder or Tettrazzini; but come up . . .

"Mind" (he twisted to Sinden), "excuse this patter. You came in the middle and must bear with it for the navigator's sake. . . . Mind," he resumed, "you are as blind, when you are down under, as a mole, and must learn to see with your claws and nose. There's nothing else for it. The airman is like the farmer with a spade and a dog. But the mole is less easily seen than a submarine when she's down under, so keep moving. It's no use to sit still. You can't afford luxuries of that sort in shoal water when a seaplane with a pocketful of bombs is monkeying for a pot shot. . . .

"You've got to get up and bark. That may scare him, drive him higher up, anyhow . . . and if he doesn't get rattled and sheer off, remember it's just as comfortable to be done in with your head out of water as in it. Now we'll go downstairs and look at the instruments."

They climbed through the open hatch, passed down the conning-tower and control, and reached the cylindrical centre body of the vessel, where everything that matters in a submarine takes form. They examined the gauges, the levels, the fool-proof fitments, tubes, voice-pipes, and came to the small flap table, where presently the navigator would work out his reckoning, plot his courses, and bury himself waist deep in the abstruse data which explains our tidal system.

A long, narrow passage held these men. At the centre its width was about four feet clear—that is to say, something not very much wider than a dining-table. Head room was sufficient, but not more. A tall man would go bent in some sections,

while even a short one would be compelled to crawl in others. Forward were tubes, the torpedoes shining in oily calm close at hand. Every inch of space was apportioned, and somewhere forward of the control a couple of bunks, one on either side, with sliding doors drawn, showed that sleep was still considered a factor in equipment.

But all this was A B C to Sinden, who made at once for the eyes of the boat on leaving the control.

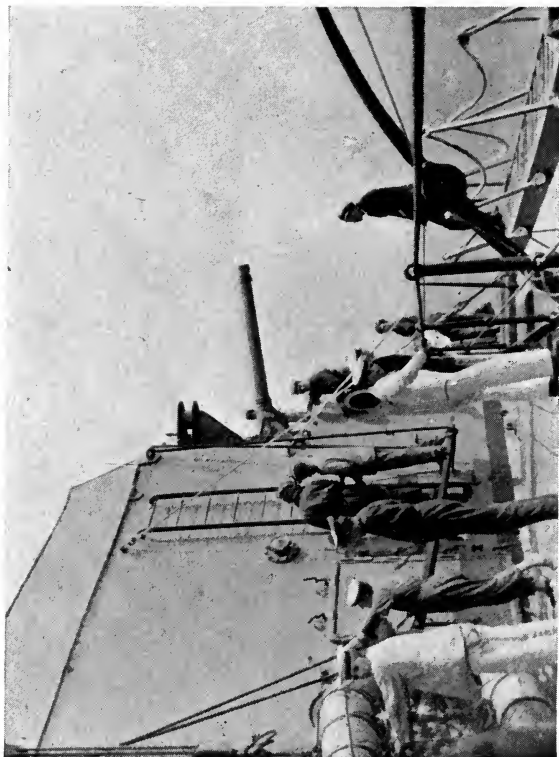
The first he passed without comment, a sinking of buoyancy at once noticeable. Then he came to No. 2 and crowed: "Kelvin for a dollar, sir!" searched and found confirmation, and again crowed—one can call it nothing else: "Knew it! Without Kelvin we should still be groping. Without the chaps who cut the gadgets we see with, we might just as well tie up our boats . . . and this"—he pressed a lever—"is the last word, not only in clarity and power . . . but, by the Lord! You can see. . . ." He became mute, morseing the word it was unwise to whisper then or now: "That puts us on top. Kelvin trick, I'll swear. . . ."

He turned to the commander, who stood smiling beside him, took in his appreciation and his nod, and gave rein:

"She's a beauty, sir! . . . I'll take her where you will."

"Good!" said the commander. "To-morrow we shall give you full charge."

Now to-morrow and many successive to-morrows stood recorded in the log of the *Cherry-picker*, as they had dubbed her, before it was considered wise to release those who had contracted to build her and deliver her word-perfect to play her part. She was not word-perfect. She required a prompter. As a matter of fact, it is amazing that builders can string



A COMMANDER'S OPTIMISM: AND IN THE AFTERNOON IT RAINED.



PAINTING SHIP.

together so complex a machine that perfection may be expected of material honestly mute. The engineer and chief artificer claimed that she could speak, but, like the monkey, refused lest the Owner should require her to work.

England, in these days, you perceive, still required submarines. As a nation we were not enamoured of the under-water idea, and did not tackle it with any degree of enthusiasm until other countries made it plain that submarines would be the new weapon at sea. Then we built rapidly, and presently had a finer fleet than our competitors; but we had not contemplated ocean-going craft, and the vessels with which we commenced the war were as the little fighting ships of Alfred the Great to the leviathans of to-day.

Meanwhile the Grand Fleet stood across the threshold of the North Sea, and work proceeded "as requisite." It stood there challenging the German with the same calm as that with which it had taken up its stations at the end of July. Weeks had passed since then, and very little had happened. *Der Tag* and the poison gas of sterile years, but packed with bombast, seemed to have culminated in something akin to stalemate.

Then one morning the British nation woke up to read that three ships, *Aboukir*, *Cressy*, and *Hogue*, had entered the long silence while on patrol out there in the North Sea. It was a blow the nation had not expected, although there were those who had foretold what would happen, who had said plainly that surface ships would be tied to their harbours by the activities of this new deadliness—men who had warned it of the dangers to be found lurking behind Borkum and the Frisian screen which shut in Ems. The proximity of Ostend, Zeebrugge, and Antwerp to our shores—

towns which might in certain eventualities pass into enemy hands—had been foreseen ; and to it all the nation had turned a deaf ear. Now it became angry, and mutterings of that stupid cry “ What is the Navy doing ? ”— which first was heard from Newcastle—saluted those who fought.

Obviously the Navy was losing certain vessels which it had no special desire to lose. Obviously naval men were going into the ditch in the old way, and the nation was beginning to reward them, as it rewarded the victors of Copenhagen, the loser at Minorca, and all that bunch of blunderers who won for it the over-sea lands we still called Colonies. These things are unpleasant to remember. One would like to be able to say that it ended with the loss of those ships ; but that would only be another specimen of the historic terminological inexactitude.

For a month the *Cherrypicker* worked from her base in the North Sea with nothing very startling to report. Occasionally she sighted an enemy submarine, dived and proceeded full speed to attack ; but always when she put up her periscope to resight and train the sea was void of enemy craft.

Notes in Sinden's handwriting show in terse outline the heartbreak of these happenings. They show, too, something of the conditions of under-sea warfare. The constant strain on nerve and sight, the extraordinary hazards, the joy of going to the bottom to avoid the rush of surface craft, when it may so happen that you plump on a mine capable of lifting you to the surface again—for one dull moment in scattered sections. They tell one of the blind fumbling, the mole-like striving when netted ; how Joss is the ruling factor always and at all times, when some force holds you pinned fathoms below surface. It

may be a mine mooring which has fouled some excrescence in the hull, the planes, the propeller, the rudder, the screens of your conning-tower. The mine, if you wobble too much, may come down and detonate. If you start the propellers, you may be firing the match which will send you skyward, . . . or it may be you are foul of wreckage—some sunken craft whose yards and masts have not yet resolved. You cannot see. You peer out of the conning-tower scuttles and fancy a thousand chains are holding you. You see things with tentacles which slobber near the glass—it may be weed, or it may be Hun mechanism set to hold you fast deep down where in the course of certain days and nights you will no longer be able to breathe. You will feel the slow approach of that torpor which ends in asphyxiation and question whether it has not already commenced. Your breath will come less readily because of these things. Your heart will beat as seemed impossible, and then, with a fine burst for freedom at all hazards, you will turn on the gramophone, order the engines full speed astern, and remember that Joss still stands for those who fight, beckons to those who trust, and will not fail you.

So you come out of that hole—terror, if you prefer it—with a little twisting and buckling, and prepare to enter another under the same guidance. But first you must take a look at the sun; failing the sun, at daylight, or starlight—anything of that world which once was yours to see.

Fog, in these conditions, is plain delight; a gale with curly crests, sheer joy of life; the sun, if it be there when you emerge, your betrothed in her gentlest mood.

But there was very little sun in the failing months

of 1914. A curtain was drawn upon a warring world. Earth quaked at the blast which blew with ever increasing violence on the wrecked lands of Belgium and France. Our First Seven Divisions were being pounded to the death. Behind them was the North Sea, to the right of them France, heroically standing to bear back the legions of *Kultur* which stood over her. Nothing behind either but the Channel and the North Sea, dominated and held in grip by the Grand Fleet, which then was England in being, Albion the white and shining presence, the promise, trust and hope, of half the world.

It was a dark period, black with portent. England seemed on the verge of paying for the ikon smashers who had conspired to make her unready. Coronel had been fought and lost. Gallantry had again been shown to be no fit weapon against massed guns of greater calibre. Craddock was gone, *Monmouth* and *Good Hope*, with all their skill and vim and splendid comradeship, were gone ; and von Spee was seeking colliers in preparation for a dash on the Cape—thence, who knows, to make a bid, perhaps, for that part of Australia which would fall to him, in accordance with the War-Lord's promise.

Sinden, P. & O., and Archer, the Engineer-Commander of the *Cherrypicker*, knew these things and breathed with closed lips. They had seen preparations in being, had laid for one tremendous hour beside the *Inflexible*, knew her errand and that of her sister, although the wardroom frankly was in the dark.

“One of Jacky Fisher's sleuth-hounds,” Sinden acknowledged as he stood in the *Cherrypicker's* conning-tower to watch her sail. “It will be touch and go, though. If they get out in time, we shall scotch them ; if too late, we shall monkey von Spee

all round the world and back again. . . . It's time something was done to show South America we mean business. There isn't a republic south of Yucatan but the Germans have got a lien on it . . . I know. I haven't lived in the Argentine for nothing. The old flag was wiped out long before Coronel, as far as South America goes. . . ."

He turned in the growing dusk and waved his hand in the direction of H.M.S. *Inflexible*. "God speed, old darling!" he crooned. "Get her going hell for leather, an' let 'em see what the Navy can do with its children."

An hour later he gave the order to close down, and dived to test the *Cherrypicker* before proceeding to his beat. Then in the morning when it was grey dawn he sighted a vessel broad off on the port bow which brought him fame—with the few who knew.

There had been mist, in patches, and Sinden was in the act of closing down when a whiff of air from the north-east lifted the curtain and disclosed a Fritz, also on the surface. The navigator got her bearing, scuttled with his commander, and in less than a minute the *Cherrypicker* had vanished and a voice was saying "Starboard Forty!"; then as the electric engines came into action, "Stand by tubes!"

There followed a movement of the crew to stations and silence.

Instantly the purr of dynamos filled the throbbing hull. The *Cherrypickers* breathed hard. Hitherto they had found no chance, only the tortuous business of entanglements and mine-fields: but here was Fritz, a live Fritz, apparently-oblivious of danger. Would they draw his teeth? Would they, in the days to come, when one could talk, be able to say what they might not say now—in the chimney-

corner perhaps, with bright eyes lifted, cheeks flushed, fingers working spasmodically at buttons which in all conscience were clean? . . . Would they be able to give chapter and verse of their first shot, or would the other fellow score?

It was a toss up. No soul of them could say certainly that Fritz had been caught napping. Not one of them but might in a few minutes—five, ten, twelve—be blown to fractions. Not one of them in that case. . . .

“Bow tubes ready . . . beam tubes ready!”

There came a hiss of compressed air, a trickle of water running with startling clarity somewhere. A subdued clang . . . and through it all the hum of dynamos, the clang, recurring as of bolts shot in a cavern deep bedded in the earth. Sweat stood in beads on Sinden’s brow; he loathed the secrecy of the thing, but it was war. P. & O. felt a curious lifting of the hair beneath his cap; then came an order to blow down and rise to twenty-eight. The noise of pumping ensued, and upon that the commander’s sharp voice—“Stand by bow tubes!”—as he passed to the high-power periscope.

A little twisting of wheels and a grunt from Sinden. It was as though he had said “missed.” Then, in a silence which could be felt, the men saw him lean away from the eyepiece to say: “Under a thousand. Call it eight hundred. . . . Fire starboard bow tube!”

He reached back his left cuff and stood critically examining the dial of his watch. The boat rolled slightly, echoing to a dull thud which seemed to have come from the confines of the world. Others suddenly found it necessary to consult their watches, to count the seconds, as it were, between now and the beyond. Then came a stronger vibration, a thud

so solid and violent that the *Cherrypicker* throbbed from stem to stern ; and upon that sound, as though it were part of the game, Sinden's voice, calm and restrained, was heard saying :

" Got him ! . . . Now we can go up and makee look-see."

The look-see revealed a patch of discoloured water amidst the greyness—something grey floating in it, atoms swimming in it, all grey and blurred from the shock with which they had been hurled to the surface.

Sinden stared and gave the necessary orders, but his gorge rose at the sight. It was un-English—like shooting a sitting bird. In spite of his elation he execrated the necessity. A stand-up fight is another matter, but this stealthy business of sneaking upon your enemy and cutting him down without a word of preparation, now that he had done it, appalled. But it was war, as understood in the twentieth century ; war as shaped by the enemy and the All-Highest *Pickelhaube* who led it ; war in its deadliest and most scientific form, which Sinden must carry through whether he loved or hated it.

Nevertheless it was essential to do something to take the taste away. So the *Cherrypickers* got orders to save the drowning, and turned with alacrity to obey. Four they hauled on board from the edge of the pit ; fed, clothed, and put them to sleep in bunks which hitherto had been untenanted. Then, as there was nothing else they could do, they carried their prisoners sedately to the depôt, " as required, in order to obtain medical attention."

Thus, without talk or illuminating head-lines, the *Cherrypickers* passed through the ordeal of their first encounter, under the leaden skies of the North, took breath, and moved out for further rehearsal. En-

tanglements remained to be unravelled, channels searched, enemy craft caught and crushed. All the maze of plot and counterplot, all the sage plannings which keep men awake when they should be asleep ; the tense fight with conditions, the necessity to avoid mines, to avoid aircraft when amidst the shoals ; to battle with wind and rain, sleet, hail, seas, and all the hurled misery of force. To stand on watch when the seas hissed past and face the blind groping which ensued if they dived . . . that was the business of the *Cherrypickers* in the closing months of the year.

They were weeks of stress and watching which few can gauge who have not experienced the thing in being. Weeks when it was impossible to say of the next minute that one individual would remain to greet it. When all men's lives depended on the commander. When it was impossible for him to delegate his burden of responsibility and he sat or stood staring into the eyepiece of his periscope with scarcely a rest, lifting it, lowering it, twisting it so that he could see what passed on every hand. When he knew that for the smallest drowsiness or inattention he and all who were entrusted to him would pay with their lives—that he alone must carry on.

A strain of that nature would soon become unendurable, precisely as trench warfare after a while spells madness. Hence the regulation for change of scene and, when it is possible, leave, as we understand it now. But in the early days this was impossible. Sinden and his crew were holding the gap, exactly as our men of the First Seven Divisions were holding it in Flanders. England was unready ; therefore the men we had deputed to defend us must stand between us and the Cross.

Meanwhile authority saw that the *Cherrypickers*

had proved themselves and decided to move them to other fields . . . perhaps to Fiddlers' Green, which, as all the world may discover, is the Elysian Field "reserved for sailors and vagabond craftsmen," if they care to consult what, I suppose, is the standard English dictionary.*

The hour struck for their departure one night in December, when a blizzard and a gale had between them conspired to keep all hands without sleep for thirty-six hours. The men were nearly dead-beat, Sinden, as he expressed it, ready for a wringer, when a wireless came through ordering him to return to the base.

This was in the nature of a deliverance. The gale came at them from the north with ears laid back and teeth bared. They had been compelled by their work to remain on the surface, but now they would be able to dive. The grim arc of the heavens which spanned them was engaged in riddling fine snow far up overhead, and the wind carried it in nearly parallel lines across them. There was no escape from its lash. They were clothed in white and swept by the sea in alternating moments of time. Look-out used a shovel to clear the deck behind the screen; the man who tended the hatch was kept busy slapping it to and re-opening it. Those on the conning-tower were wet to the skin; those who were below were wet from an opposite cause.

The submarine plunged and reared and twisted—pumped is the term—like a scared mount in that regiment whence she found her name. It was cold with the biting quality of high altitudes traversed by their kinsmen of the Air Service; but it was wet as well as cold, and torpor moving to assert its power.

* Webster's "New International Dictionary."

Then Joss put an end to their vigil with a wireless which said: "Return to base with all speed." Sinden looked upon this as coming from Joss, and he should know. You will understand the alacrity with which he gave the order to close down and how speedily they got under—seeing Joss ordered that also. You will be inclined to agree with Sinden, too, that there is only one objection to Britannia's rule of the Ocean, and that is that she cannot rule it smooth.

Steaming cups of diluted beef essence greeted them as they descended to sixty feet, turned about, and made for home. Potted meat, butter, and biscuit helped to put torpor to flight, helped to bring back the quip and badinage which is the hall-mark of the wardroom in war time or in peace. But Sinden was in a critical mood. He foresaw things. He was looking ahead and wearing Jules Verne's glasses.

"There is a day coming," said he, "when we shall run these things"—he swept the narrow passage with a half-armed swing, nodding sagely—"without men. Destroyers will come under the same law. No crews. Just a machine governed by waves. You will touch a key somewhere in your eerie, and out she will go. You will touch another key, and you will direct her course. By-and-by when she comes near her objective you will touch off a tin-fish and switch her back by the way she came . . . What?"

"A sort of glorified Brennan," the navigator smiled.

"Without the wire, old dear! Without all crushing handicaps; without even a gold-laced sleeve to . . ."

"What radius will she have?" Archer questioned, opening a valve.

"The coast line behind Borkum will be within it."

"Ah! Then you will have done something for sight while you were at work with the waves . . . ?"

"Sight!" Sinden paused, half hesitating, then brushed aside cobwebs. "Sight?" he reiterated. "Of course we shall have fixed that too. We shall be able to use glasses that will never hurt us by their use . . . 'nother kind of thing altogether. Waves will be in that too, Archie-boy. Refraction will be in it. . . . It will be a jumble, but stupidly simple. Ask the Kelvin-sahib. He knows. It will happen . . . but before that time comes we shall have done other things—you and I and P. & O., the whole crowd—and, and we shan't like some of them much. . . . Give me another juice."

He held forth his cup. Archer poured and, as he poured, asked :

"But how d'you know these things will happen ?"

"God knows ! . . . Waves, perhaps. I feel it in my bones."

Then they turned on music, changed sodden garments, and pretended they were glad to have sold their farms in order to become Fritz-hunters.

On the morrow, late, they came up off a lightship whose signal had guided them for the past hour and found the snow vanished. A blazing sky welcomed them over the flats of Essex as they entered, but had drawn a curtain when they came alongside.

The mother-ship still lay there in spite of Hun raids, her corridors and endless trim cabins, her servants, wardroom, and jovial brotherhood, all as if no snow had been, no blizzard, only the calm stillness of a winter's day. But before it was possible to enjoy these luxuries Sinden went to report, got orders for Whitehall at 2.30 the next day, interviewed his servant, and turned in with the knowledge that something certainly would happen—to-morrow.

II

Sealed orders were the outcome of that trip to town in his best bib and tucker, together with a second envelope to be opened at noon on December the 15th at a certain rendezvous.

Meanwhile Sinden had three days' leave and was free, with Archer, P. & O., and the rest, to speculate on the nature of their next cruise. Sinden was very cock-a-hoop at that time. My Lords had unbent for a few minutes, and had spoken kindly of his zeal and endurance. They mentioned the fact that his name was down for recognition. So he telegraphed to his mother and spent three splendid days of leisure at the old home in Surrey. It was his first leave, and he enjoyed it to the full; yet when he came to his room at night, he sat before the fire, head sunk, his hands clasped closely across his eyes. He could not have explained that action. His eyes seemed tired, that was all.

On the 12th the *Cherrypickers* cast off their moorings and proceeded to the rendezvous, where three days later they came in touch with other submarines and an escort: here they opened their sealed orders and discovered they were not bound to the Adriatic, as some surmised, but farther east—out there, indeed, where already a fleet was collecting, and whispers had gone the rounds predicting the nature of its activities.

It seems that at that time it was as essential to play to the gallery as it is on occasion in other theatres. On the sea we had taken some hard blows, and, in spite of the heartening effect of the Falkland action, something spectacular was desired. Therefore, as at other periods in this war, speeches, threatenings and the rest, had been made conveying information

to the enemy while preparations matured. We were to slam at stone walls once more, even as at Alexandria in 1882.

In spite of Nelson's letter to Lord Hood on the wisdom of attacking forts with ships, in spite of Moltke's plain ruling on the same question, in order to assist Russia and block the way to the East we were preparing to pit floating batteries against shore positions mounting heavy Krupp guns. That these defences dominated a channel which narrowed down to about three-quarters of a mile at Chenak, a channel blocked by mines and other devilments, seemed to escape notice.

"There is nothing the Navy cannot do" had become sheer headiness. The Navy knew, and knows quite well, what is possible and what is impossible. Doubtless it had weighed the precedent of Alexandria, knew how Alexandria was defended, and was able to compare man values in so glaring an instance. Fuzzies in the scales with the Turk!—the Turk, too, in the hands of a German over-lord. It stands out, written or unwritten, that the Navy knew.

Sinden and those with whom he talked on the long stretch between England and the East had no doubt. Gibraltar, Malta, and other centres of definite knowledge were all decided that the thing could be done, provided, as Hornby advised in 1877, the Bulair lines were occupied by soldiers.

Some one asked where the soldiers were coming from, and at once there came back the shot: "God knows! I'm not in official secrets—but soldiers there will be. . . . How else in this world or to-morrow is it to be done?"

"There's a talk of our doing it off our own bat—that's all," was the comment.

"There's talk of a new system of ventilation for

all *Cherrypickers*," Sinden laughed, " but that doesn't prove anything except that we shall want it out here."

But when Sinden got orders to examine certain sectors of the Straits, and left Mudros for that purpose, no soldiers had been seen making preparations for a descent on Bulair, no transports had arrived, nor was there any word of their coming.

The Navy, it will be seen, was going to be very busy with its bat.

Sinden was absent a fortnight on that cruise and learnt much of what was in store. He had scraped through the mine-fields that guarded the Straits and hied clear away into the Sea of Marmora. To use the cock-a-hoop phrase of the day, he had threatened Constantinople, held up the traffic between Europe and Asia, and seemed able to do the trick without soldiers. As a matter of fact, Sinden was astonishing the Turks by his gentlemanly methods. It appears they expected him to adopt U-boat tactics and to sink at sight; yet, if a ship came his way, he ran alongside and searched her—brailed her up, as he said, with a shot across her bows and then boarded her to " make his look-see."

Sometimes the Turks took headers on his approach; then Sinden saved them, gave them cigarettes, and told them to sit in the sun and get dry. He was careful always to reassure people who took fright on his approach. He said that if his object was to kill men he could do it with guns without coming near, and that it was silly to get into the sea and pretend they were all Boyntons.

Then one day he brought an old paddle steamer to, and on going on board found not only contraband, but a deckload of women and children. As he was

unable to ferry the women to a place of safety within the meaning of the phrase, he ordered the Turkish captain to carry on, get to his port, and land his people quickly.

He gave him to understand that the *Cherrypicker* would be there or thereabouts awaiting that landing, and advised him in a broken mixture of French, English, and Spanish to stir his stumps, as the tin-fish he had in pickle for him was of a brand noted for keeping faith. So the skipper made haste for the particular wharf which awaited him, and Sinden followed in his wake, submerged when he judged it expedient, and came in when the sun was down. He sunk three ships instead of one and retired satisfied.

The Turks talked of these doings of the clean-shaven Giaour who commanded the British under-sea marvel, and, if one may put faith in the accounts which take the place of those records which once were *de rigueur*. he went even to the gates of Pera, which is beyond Stamboul, and brought consternation to those who dwelt in Therapia, a far-off Elysium midway to the Black Sea.

By this time it was generally understood in London that we had smashed every fort from Kum Kale and Sedd-el-Bahr to Nagara and Cham Kalessi. Why, having done these things, the fleet still remained in the Ægean is not quite plain; but had Sinden tried his luck past the smashed forts on the surface, it is safe to assert he would never have reached his base.

As a matter of fact the return journey was even more perilous than the outward—or, the *Cherrypicker* had less luck. Across the Sea of Marmora it was fairly plain trick-work, but from Bulair, which we were to hold, to Cape Helles, which the Turks still held, is a distance of forty miles—a run, indeed, of exceptional danger, either submerged or awash.

Sinden took it submerged, and was plagued by a current which no man can gauge, whether he be on the surface or under it. Nor was it advisable to attempt the passage at night, for all this group of smashed forts were able to use their searchlights very much as we use them here when a raid is expected. What chance so distinct a target would have in these circumstances Sinden decided by going down to sixty feet and feeling his way with the boat's nose. His chart, spread on the small flap-table, gave him all that could be gleaned as to the depths, course, and distance ; but it could only generalise about currents. "Here," it would say, "there is little or no current." "Here it runs from two to three knots," straight down between the rock hills and scrub where presently the soldiers would be engaged. "Here it runs four knots at times"—that is to say, four and a half miles an hour.

It is tricky work in daylight to pass through the Narrows, as all sailors know ; but to navigate it under-sea with only occasional glimpses of the darker land as shown in a periscope is a feat deserving the highest praise. It is a feat one would like to describe in all its wonderful hazards, the backings and turnings which take place, the patience and calm of the men sitting in a machine which has been forced upon us, which no one can love ; the stealthy glide to the surface when no "way" must be on your ship lest a feather of spray, ringing the periscope, bring quick-firing guns into action, and you go down in a bath of oil and a vast turmoil of bubbles. The sweating, tense silence and concentration of faculties intended for finer work is here. It is a nightmare of all that is strenuous, unnatural, and crippling ; yet in this war we have learned to look upon the Submarine Service as a necessity—which in very truth it is ;

but we have not thought it necessary to find wreaths for the Navy which has provided the Service. We have pilloried certain chiefs and dared to pat the Navy on the back. We have pretended that we differentiate between the *personnel* of the fleets and the staff which directs it . . . as though we could hurt the chiefs and leave the Navy cold.

That, perhaps, is the reason one hears across the flats sometimes, out there where it is a toss up what happens next moment, "What's the latest London whine?" and the answer, given in an instant, "Strafeum's lost his collar stud and expects the Navy to find it."

Sinden got through, and presently reached his base with all his pumps at work and the *Cherry-picker* looking like a motor that has been driven through wire entanglements. He made his report in due season. He said he regretted that when coming through the last row of mines—he mentioned the exact depth at which he found them—he unfortunately fouled an obstruction. This held him up for three mortal hours, and seemed particularly difficult to escape. To his pals he said that at one time he thought he would be compelled to try looping the loop; to his Chief he said he was nearly at his wits' end. To his pals he said the sweat poured off all hands, and that was the reason they set the pumps going; to his Chief he said the temperature rose considerably—which doubtless was true. But the evolution by which he cleared was inspired by simple desperation. Sedd-el-Bahr was to starboard, Kum Kale to port, and searchlights were sweeping the Straits. After suffering asphyxiation and some other sorrows, he "took a round turn out of her" and came blatant and vengeful to the surface.

He had broken something. Perhaps wrenched a plane off her—hence the leak and . . . the altogether.

But he had brought himself and all hands back. For that the Chief was thankful—there were so many urgencies that the Navy could ill brook the loss either of craft or crew. They would be examined, overhauled if necessary, and set a-spinning as soon as possible. The Chief regretted the delay; Sinden regretted it even more deeply; but it must be said here leave and treatment were essential if the man was to be saved—and leave, now, was impossible.

Sinden did not apply for it. He knew the burden which rested on that tiny hunter squadron: the crew knew it also; but because they were British sailors, they went about their work without rhetorical encouragement from those who governed. Nothing was said of “bonuses,” nor “overtime,” nor increased pay—all or either of which had been found so essential, even in war time, elsewhere.

A month had passed the way of others, and the *Cherry-picker* was returning from patrol up and down the coast between Cape Helles and Suvla Bay.

The soldiers had come at last, and were busy, as the sailors said, clinging to the rocks with their eyebrows. Place-names never before heard by the majority were in the process of being burned upon the hearts and consciences of thousands. “Implacable Landing” (of a truth implacable), “Gaba Tepe,” “Beach Y,” “Beach V,” and the shambles by the *River Clyde* had, each and all of them, a specific meaning for those who waited here, a throb and aglow in turn, for news. “Boomerang Fort” and “Achi Baba” grew to be names on the far side of the Styx, old Charon busy with his ferry on the

near. Sedd-el-Bahr, Chenak, and Kum Kale all became involved in a glamour the background of which was death. We cheered to the echo, but a sob was in that cheer. The Anzac fathers, mothers, took a deep breath as they read, and said in their hearts, They are ours!—bone of our bone, blood of our blood. Britannia, they are ours! . . . And there were none here who would gainsay them.

Our knowledge of this barren and waterless ridge known as the Gallipoli Peninsula grew with our amazement at the deeds wrought under the iron hail of the Turk. Since August, 1914, we had been learning to appreciate our soldiers and their kinsmen the sailors. We had heard that a soldier could not move unless a sailor carried him in his pack, and were quite hazy as to what was inferred; but now we understood, and walked in mute acknowledgment of their joint deeds. We scarcely knew our sons. Those of us who were aware of their metal were equally silent with those who had doubted. It was tragedy in the theatre of ancient Greece—Greece standing twiddling thumbs at the sacrifice.

Deep in the thoughts of all thinkers was the deathless comment of the Frenchman: “C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre.”

To Sinden and those who had seen the “silenced forts” and knew their strength it was tragedy *in excelsis*. They had seen their slaughtered ships and witnessed the torrent of shells flung upon those rocky uplands, and they had seen the forts revive as again and again their garrisons emerged from shelter, to blaze at some new venture. On the sea Nelson’s attitude went the rounds: “The business of laying wood (ships) before walls (forts) is not much altered of late, and even if they had no hot shot . . . the quantity of powder and shot which

would be fired away in such an attack could be much better directed from a battery on shore."

We had heard these things before, and some of us demurred. There came a day when it was necessary to cheer "the man in the street," and we heard this chant: "You must not forget the prize for which you are contending. The army of Sir Ian Hamilton and the fleet of Admiral de Robeck are separated only by a few miles from a victory such as this war has not yet seen. . . ." True, yet the phrase should have read "by a few impregnable miles," to avoid the taunt, if it be a taunt, of terminological inexactitude.

"Through the Narrows of the Dardanelles and across the ridges of the Gallipoli peninsula," the speaker continued, "lie some of the shortest paths to a triumphant peace." * True again, but, like the defence of Antwerp, too late attempted.

Midway in the Narrows lie the rusting might of great ironclads and those thousands who went down with them. Like Rodjesvensky's procession to the Far East, the conception was put out of court by the length of time allowed for an enemy's preparation.

The losses which hitherto had been borne by the fleet were now transferred to the soldiers. On the peninsula men were falling like flies. The ships which stood off to plaster impregnability with shells were now in less danger; but the strain remained. Especially was this felt by the small craft, the mosquito fleet as it is called, the mine-sweepers, patrols, supply ships, whether of the Navy or the Auxiliary Service, to the full.

Without supplies, water, food, shells, cartridges, without adequate provision to take off the wounded, land drafts, the business would have ended in swift

* Winston Churchill.

sacrifice of all who crawled and clung amid the boulders. Navy and Merchant Service came in here, day by day, week by week, running the gauntlet so that men who fought might have a fighting chance. There is a beach near Anzac Cove called Hell's Beach ; but all the beaches were hells as all the improvised jetties and huts were death-traps : yet was there no pause in bringing supplies, no check for the gallant men clambering up there amidst scrub and rock ; men who fought, dug, rested, ate and drank with the ping of myriad bullets in their ears, the crash of countless shells, while a lordly sun poured down upon them to bring them torture.

There were days when Sinden and his brothers, confined in the narrow limits of their *Cherry-picker*, prayed for the larger freedom of battleship or destroyer, scout, patrol, anything which could float ; but the exigencies of the Service kept them chained. You cannot train submarine men in half a day or half a year. For that reason, if for no other, a submarine crew remains for under-water attack.

It was hot in the confined space known as the conning-tower ; but it was hotter, as Archer knew, below. While on service it was impossible to stretch without knocking a pal or your funny-bone ; but their training steadied the men. They knew how to lose, if losers they must be, and they knew the consequences of being too warmly clad, and took to wearing the rig of their brothers up there in the trenches.

Shorts, a cap, shoes and singlets was considered the minimum ; but if the flies permitted, and shoulders had been blistered into hardihood, then shirtless. A shirtless brigade indeed, these men of the under-sea service, at all possible times. Without much room to walk, with flies in swarms to pester

them, the black dust of Impregnability sticking in lines and puckers of their flesh—dust pushing into the corners of their eyes, dust pendent in the air they breathed, in the food, on the water they drank—and, with the dust, flies which bit and fought that they might bite.

To Sinden in his eerie it seemed the flies were getting surfeited, the crew bloodless. He smashed at them from time to time, but failed to score. They were as keenly alive to a descending slipper as the fleas to a searching hand. . . . Not all jam and jest, you perceive, in the pursuit of victory, despite the funny booklets reiterating stale jokes and the priceless badinage of Tommy and Jack. Not all song and laughter, not all heroism and sangfroid . . . something lurking, indeed, which the ego which is in us recognises for what it is.

A yearning for the country which has few flies and no black dust, a place where fleas are kept in control. A longing for the end of this beastliness, this quagmire of blood and rotting flesh on which we pour quicklime and sentiment with liberal hand. A cessation of the eternal jar of guns, of bombs flung from craft which appear as silver midges amidst the blue . . . an end, if the gods will, of talk, and the polished periods of obese and lean alike who seek to throw dust as the Huns throw leaflets.

Sinden was tired. He was grimy and prayed for a bath—not the sea, but somewhere where he could wash and stretch forth and find a clean towel. To-morrow, please God, he would get one. Meanwhile ridges of black dust upon arms and hands, neck and eyes; a stickiness from salt-water bathing, heat, prickly heat, flies which buzzed—sleepy, fat, gorged flies straight from enemy bodies, dead horses, mules.

That was the environment of the *Cherrypickers* as

they ran for stores and a tub from under the heel of war.

Sinden got that bath and instantly became a new man. P. & O., Archer, every soul on that efficient but circumscribed unit, had tubbed and shaved and tasted a leg-ache. They had been for the walk that every healthy Englishman considers as essential as breakfast. They had been pestered by Greeks, enticed by women and pimps, and had returned to the mother-ship early, for to-morrow, it appeared, they must sail.

No one minds sailing when one is quartered abroad. It is as well to be at sea as in most countries beyond the white cliffs of England. Lemnos, Tenedos, Besika Bay, Suvla were all more fascinating in the days of Troy, Hector, Helen, and the god-like Priam than they are to-day. High explosives had not been made, nor poison gas invented; one had not to gather *disjecta membra* with a shovel, but sought out old Charon whole.

P. & O. put this into words as they sat in the ward-room after dinner that night.

"It doesn't matter a jigger where we are while we are out here. The boat's as good as the company of those syncopated Greeks who have let us down."

"Did I hear treason?" Sinden asked lazily, alert over his cigar.

"Truth, sir," P. & O. objected.

"Same thing. What's the punishment, Pay, for so gross a breach of etiquette?"

"On this occasion, as it's his first offence, W. and S. for the crowd. I'm thirsty."

"Right-o! Press the button, somebody, and turn on the music, or I shall go to bed."

III

As a matter of fact they did not sail for two days. It was found necessary to prepare for a lengthy cruise, so the *Cherrypicker* lay beside her mother and her officers took two baths daily to make up for lost opportunities. The black sand of the peninsula had become part of their kit. Nothing less than boiling would remove it, and that the men refused.

Sinden winced when the programme was unfolded to him, but he made no effort to obtain leave. The same love for the flag and his pals which had induced him to sell his estancia, which had caused him to raise money out of capital when pay was short, to sell cattle to buy sword and Webley, compelled him to carry on now that the end drew near. Nor was it only the call of the Motherland, but of his brothers at Osborne and Dartmouth, whom it was impossible to desert; love of honour—hatred for the cut-throat methods of Germany, if you will—love and reverence in full for the dear old country, who, with her brain dizzy with the demands of her children and her arms full of nostrums, boldly stepped into the ring when Belgium called.

He liked to think of her so, unready as usual, but ready to roll back her sleeves and get ready. Symbolism appealed to him; hence his love for the flag. Honour appealed to him; hence the speed with which he returned to Admiralty—hence, too, his refusal now, when the Service wanted him, to apply for leave. As he put it to P. & O. that night they sailed, "Little Mary cried for change, but he simply couldn't humour her."

So they sailed, crept through the mine-fields, passed up the Narrows, and entered the old hunting-ground in the sea which had brought them low

There were transports to sink, and on occasion they sank them; supply ships to watch and put down the ditch; vessels of the trader brand to overhaul, search, sink or pass; frightened Turks, screaming women, to reassure. There were brickbats and buckets of boiling water to fend off or dodge, patrols to escape; a suggestion of armed resistance, rifle fire which was most disconcerting to a crew who used a submarine in the time-honoured British way.

The truth is that submarines do not lend themselves to gentlemanly handling. They are too delicate, too easily put out of action, for close-quartered attacks. It is only by dint of building them in batches that the Hun, with his methods to aid him, is able to find U-boats for slaughter.

Sinden took blows and smiles with the same quiet reserve. He could be dangerous when pushed. The Turks had learned to understand him and those who worked with him. If he overhauled them and found stores or contraband, it was *kismet*. They bowed. So did the ship; but never once did the *Cherrypicker* imperil a crew who behaved honestly, or sink a vessel carrying passengers.

Two months of this chaffering under a burning sun, drinking water which sometimes was foul, sweating on the surface, sweating on the bottom, whither often it became necessary to retire; two months of glare alternating with dust and salt, wind-driven to bring you brash and dim your sight . . . weeks of periscope staring, of flies and dirt, then the mother-ship calling, beckoning, ordering you to return. A day of ghastly peril down there by Bulair and the *Cherrypicker* was away, wobbling towards home and Mudros.

Sinden sat in the look-out when dawn appeared.

Astern were the forts he had eluded, Kum Kale the last, already darkening against the glowing sky. Astern the burnished pathway of the sun, which presently would glow and ring the submarine with fire. To get her out of range was Sinden's task, to make her hum his prayer to Archer each time he looked for air. "Get her along, old thing; get her along!" he pleaded, and the Engineer-Commander, looking at those streaming eyes, promised safety.

For a while Sinden nursed his glasses, turning them upon the stretch of water which slowly became golden; then he pushed them back in their case and leaned forward, pressing the palms of both hands to his eyes.

For some minutes he remained thus, a still figure before the coxswain who stood over him. Then again he swept the horizon, but without glasses. He turned and spoke to the helmsman.

"When did you get a sleep last?" he asked.

The man considered and presently said: "Tuesday, forenoon watch, sir."

"And this is Friday," commented the Commander. 'I am rather worse off than you, lad. I had none on Tuesday, nor on Monday night. Give me a call if you see me nodding.'

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Autre temps, autre mœurs," the Commander explained. "What?"

"That's wot the Greek said w'en 'ee stole the bloke's purse, sir," smiled the coxswain.

The Commander sat a trifle more erect and glanced up to see a face wooden beyond words, not a smile within a mile.

"Did he?" he questioned. "Do you know that was very shrewd of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"And of you, too, Widdett, eh?"

"Yes, sir . . ."

"And don't forget you slept later than I did by eighteen mortal hours . . . e-yah! Gad! I could yawn my head off. . . . I'm almost beyond speech, and there's forty odd miles on the horizon of things to keep me doddering. . . . Whisht! If I could only walk, or dance . . . anything," he concluded *sotto voce*, "but sit still and see spots . . . spots . . . spots that twist and whirl like catherine-wheels without a spark of light . . ."

Again he leaned forward, pressing the palms of his hands upon his eyes. He remained so long thus that the coxswain coughed, discreetly eyeing him sidelong.

"Right-o!" said the Commander. He did not spring suddenly alert. He opened his eyes and stared ahead—as a man does who is in full possession of his faculties. After a minute he called to the coxswain with the voice of one intent on discovery. "See that?" he asked.

The helmsman looked round uncertain:

"Which, sir?"

"There, man—two points on the port bow . . . looks like a periscope, or a stake or something. Mean to say you *don't* see it?"

"No, sir . . . leastways . . . two points out, sir?" He shook his head. "Sorry, sir. I don't seem to pick it up—for the minute, sir."

"You must have damned bad sight, Widgett," the Commander commented. "There—now!" He pointed, "just under that cloud, the one with the shell-burst crowning it—see?"

"No, sir."

"See the cloud?"

"Yes, sir . . . no doubt about the cloud, sir, but . . ."

"Not the periscope, eh? Well, well, it doesn't matter. It has gone under again, I expect—gone under, what?"

"It's a thing they can do, sir," the coxswain replied warily, his eyes still searching the blue which lay spread for their passage.

The *Cherrypicker* moved slowly down the glinting track the sun had thrown. She was beyond the reach of guns now, but sitting awkwardly awash, her periscopes smashed and a hole in the conning-tower which effectually kept her on the surface. The coxswain twisted the little wheel with the deft touches of one absorbed in his task. He stood so still he might have been graven in stone. Below in the engine-room Archer and an artificer watched the throbbing Diesels; in the control a sailor stood in close touch with levers and voice pipes; the rest slept the sleep of men who had wrought for days and nights amidst the tricky currents of the Dardanelles.

It was a perfect morning—hot already, and smeared about the horizon with wisps of sun-warmed smoke, advertising the direction of the vessels that moved beneath. It was one of those gorgeous days of which steamboat sailors say "dead calm" and sometimes add "thank God!"

A breeze now would have been the supreme handicap, the final straw for men honestly overwrought. In sailing-ship days it was another business altogether. For submarines, too, a calm is looked upon as an indication that Joss has forsaken them. They have no use for it when on business; but now, it appeared, *E 01* was unable to do as she listed. She was mauled, stiff with her hurts, as her crew were stiff with wounds and lack of sleep.

You cannot manœuvre a submarine very well when one of her planes is twisted, nor submerge with

a hole in the conning-tower and the periscope knocked to Hades. You must come to the surface if possible, pretend you are a steamboat, and take what God Almighty and the enemy send to test you. That is the law for all under-sea craft, and those who would trust to plugs fashioned of towels or the end of a mattress should be placed in strait-jackets.

That, at all events, was Sinden's belief, and it must be conceded that he knew something of submarines, whole or damaged.

From afar off came the jar of guns perpetually slamming at zig-zag trenches which only the airmen could see. The shells dug holes in the peninsula, that is all, and gave men headaches. Sinden prayed that he might never see that coastline again, nor taste the beastliness it bred.

He was conscious the Turks would never be pushed from the crests they had prepared, that the force was inadequate. He was conscious of what the soldiers had done, of their dash and vim; conscious of the fleet's ordeal—conscious, indeed, that it was holy ground from which he moved . . . ground made holy by the passing to and fro of the shades of laughing comrades; wraiths of her heroic dead who had fallen, as others would fall, amidst the clefts and crannies of that boulder-strewn land.

He viewed it in the light of recent events, sub-consciously appraising it for what it was worth. He knew "they were up against bedrock," as they said, "but were not quitters." The peninsula was theirs, won by deeds which left the world wrung.

The jar of guns came over the sea and touched the shaken hull of the *Cherry-picker*. The broken high-power periscope tube quailed out a note with each vibration; but the engines sang on, droning of effort down there in the cylinder-like hull that held them.

Piled clouds towered over the land as over the sea, ringing them in with a semi-luminous barrier. To the north the seascape faded, to the west were the rounded cloud-bastions, a while ago tinged with flame. For the rest there remained the sea, flat, oily as though in presage.

For some time Sinden had remained quietly at his post, his eyes taking in the small details he loved. Now he rose, more stiff than before, and took off his coat, wrapped it about his knees, and turned to look down the hatch. The buzz of flies assailed him. He sat back, angry, bending over his hurts. "No rest from the beasts, even here," he complained. "Wonder how many there will be when coffee arrives!"

He leaned forward considering this; but the coxswain offered no opinion. It is not safe always to bandy talk with your superior, even in that section of the Navy known as the Hunter Service. The coxswain saw that his commander wore the white-topped cap which carried the King's badge; that he was clad in sweafer, shorts, a bandage and white shoes, one of which was bloody. He saw that his knees were bare and brown, his hands, neck, arms, all bare and brown as his own. But for the tell-tale bandage his commander might have been sitting down ready for a sprint; but the coxswain questioned whether he would reach Mudros.

For some time Sinden's gaze had been concentrated on a dark patch which lay on their starboard bow, but because recently he had seen a periscope where the coxswain would see nothing he maintained an open mind. Now, however, as they slowly drew near and the thing took definite shape, he raised his glasses to search anew. A moment later he turned half round and said sharply:

"Port twenty."

"Port twenty, sir," came in response as the man obeyed.

Again the commander used his glasses, commenting on the facts as they appeared.

"Looks like an upturned boat, eh, Widgett? . . . wreckage of some sort. Some poor devil of a merchantman done in, I suppose. So! Steady as she goes."

A pause ensued. Widgett twisted the wheel and stared. The commander used his glasses.

"I used to laugh at merchantmen," he commented, "but now I wonder. Consider the beautiful hazards of fighting without guns—what?"

The coxswain considered also the hazards of fighting with guns and they drew slowly near. The flies in the open conning-tower appeared excited. To the commander's ears this argued the approach of coffee, and he prayed in his sleeve the man would keep the butter and things well screened.

A picture of the conditions when last they were at Suvla Bay recurred. He was getting enured to it then, but P. & O. still jibbed. They were lying on the surface after a long sea trip, hungry, and breakfast had been announced. He had been "on deck" all night, and, now, with P. & O., went down to greet a swarm of fat buzzing trench flies. The brutes seemed to dispute who of them should breakfast.

The officers took sweat rags and swished at the pests, but struck none of them. They painted the deck overhead, that is all, awaiting the moment when these white-clad maniacs should tire. This happened quickly. The two men sat on stools and lifted a cover. Instantly the blue-green cloud fell about them and some settled on the food. Poached eggs, toast frizzled in bacon fat, bacon, all were mangled in the process of clearing that dish. The dish itself

contained many specimens that would buzz no more, and the two officers discovered they no longer desired poached eggs, or bacon, or frizzled toast fried in the bacon fat. They called the steward and bade him take it away, watched it go, and looked about the narrow room.

It was alive with flies—fat, noisy, horribly gorged from the trenches up there by Achi Baba. They grew hot considering this defeat, striving presently with the aid of slippers to bring one down. “They are cannibals,” P. & O. sang. “If you hit one you can go on hitting every time. . . . Ah! have got!” He had one smashed on the edge of a locker, and instantly the corpse was hidden by its brothers. Again the slipper came down, again and again—each stroke slaughtering, not one fly, but a bunch. The bunch grew, and so did the slaughter, Sinden slowly becoming sick, P. & O. lacking, after a time, in direction. He flung the slipper from him and rushed towards the ladder, spluttering as he spoke.

“Let’s get out of it . . . the bally cabin’s full of ’em . . . full of ’em . . .”—he shouted it out as he rushed for air.

Sinden followed. “Where in God’s name do they all come from?” he gasped.

“Turkish trenches, sir,” came in brutal comment; “they don’t bury Turks out here; the flies do that. . . . See that mule?” He pointed to a bladder-like effigy floating ahead. “Put a bullet into him. If he fetches up across our bows we are dead as Moses.”

They sent a bullet on its errand and the bladder collapsed. Flies rose over it in a cloud at the impact, fell upon it, and it was black again. Neither Sinden nor P. & O. took breakfast that morning. They were no longer hungry. They questioned whether it were

not a put-up job on the part of a strained commissariat; but that was negatived without a division.

All this had happened two months ago. They were black with sand and hungry, but now it was a memory—a dream for all time whenever the buzz of flies recurred. Loathsome! Sinden turned away, burying his face in his hands. His eyes ached—ached. God! He would have bartered his commission to escape that torture, precisely as he had bartered his estancia, long ago, that he might come home to fight the Hun.

The sun poured down upon the *Cherry-picker* as she headed towards that upturned boat of the commander's discovery. As they approached, the flies whirled, buzzing into the conning-tower, rose out of it, and winged seaward.

Sinden saw them gathering; but it was not coffee and buttered biscuit they scented. It was horse . . . one of the walers, perhaps, of some crack Anzac team; or a charger, the pet of a regiment, brought at huge cost from Sydney or Wellington, Melbourne or Auckland, to do duty in France—but done in, as they express it, in that waterless zone where master and man still clung wilting.

It was the coxswain who first gave it as his opinion that the boat was no boat, but something common enough between Imbros and the peninsula. He glanced over, rucking his nose:

"It's a carcase, sir. 'Orse, by the look of it."

• Sinden lifted his glasses and searched again. He lowered them with a wry twist.

"I believe you are right," he said. "My eyes are tired . . . dead tired. Better pull her out again."

"Beg pardon, sir! Hear them flies, sir. . . . We shall shunt the lot, sir, if we go near enough."

The commander glanced round. He lifted his glasses, but he did not see. The fly buzz became more definite.

"Then this is why they have been making all that hullabaloo," he surmised, light entering. "God! call them," he prayed, lifting his cap. "God! sweep the seas of them, clear all surface boats and under-sea boats of their drone. . . . Draw them into the sunlight that they may glisten and gorge and drown. . . . Call them as the Pied Piper called the rats. God! if we are to choose between rats and lice and flies, give me the rats . . . give me the rats!"

He twisted to face the coxswain and whispered: "Keep her away ten. Don't touch it. . . . Keep her away ten."

He looked down the conning-tower and hailed:

"Ohé! Archie-boy! . . . come up . . . come up and sniff the ambrosial East. Turn on the swizzle and blow the flies high. Drive them so that they may smell meat beyond the limit of the conning-tower. Push them so that not one of them is left below . . . and if"—he ended on a sudden minor—"you can't do that, for God's sake, do what you can."

The engineer rose head and shoulders through the hatch. The flies buzzed past.

"What's come to 'em?" he asked.

"Meat, great chief," said Sinden. "Hush! Don't spoil it. Don't tell 'em it's death. It's out there . . . and—and it's dead horse."

"No wonder you're lyrical!" Archer commented. "How's the leg, old thing?"

"Damned stiff . . . er . . . what about P. & O.?"

"Asleep with his mouth open, poor devil! Sweatin' like a bull. Got both feet through the net," said Archer. "Flies seem to like his socks."

"Course they do," Sinden nodded. "They like mine. The game one."

"Think you'll be able to stick it all the way? Or will I have to turn shellback?"

"You whack her up, Archie-boy, an' don' interfere wiz your . . . hic . . . co—co—mandin' off-isher—what?"

"Good old Sin! We'll get this jaunt carved out on vellum."

"Right-o!"

"For the benefit of buddin' snotties at Osborne an' Dartmouth . . . an' for to inspire them all with rotten pride in . . ."

"Drakes," Sinden chimed in; "Drakes only!"

"Of course," Archer smiled. "Leave a legacy, each of us, to found a chair for Drakes out of our prize-money, eh?"

"Done on vellum in gold lettering. . . . Names of individual heroes, stunt, 'mentions,' final honours at—at Fiddlers' Green. . . . So long, Archie-boy! . . . Get away downstairs an' whack her up—else, how in the world am I to get her in?"

Archer smiled.

"Balmy!" he whispered. "Poor old Sin!"

The *Cherrypicker* skimmed, steamboat-wise, over glassy sea, drawing down to Mudros Bay. On deck the sun scorched. Below the engines knocked out their toll of miles in an atmosphere which must have stilled all remaining flies. The reek of oil and the breath of the Diesels combined, in spite of singing ventilators, to keep the air foul. But Archer was there to drive, air or no air—to do the thing for which he had prepared at Kingston and Keyham, even as Sinden was doing his. From time to time he had visited his commander sitting doggedly to

carry on, and found him cheery ; but now, as he again emerged from the conning-tower, he observed him sunk, head upon hands, his fingers leaving white pressure-marks, despite the black dust with which he was smudged.

The engineer touched his shoulder, startled by this evidence of collapse.

" Pain ? " he questioned, listening to the beat of his engines and searching the headland they approached for signs of Mudros.

" Mist," Sinden whispered, looking round. " Everything fogged, old thing. Going off it, I think." He stared ahead and again pressed palms to his eyes. The coxswain made dumb signals, indicative of warning. " Is it foggy ? " Sinden asked presently, shrinking where he sat crouched.

Archer considered his friend through a maze of conflicting opinions. Was it foggy ? Lord ! it was radiant, the sea a mirror, white-hot under the sun. But it would not do to say so. Foggy ? He cast about for a suggestion of haze and found it over the island, which scintillated afar off as Menzaleh scintillates at high noon beyond the wall of the Canal.

Sinden detected the pause and shrank closer.

" Let me have it," he urged. " No use foolin' around, Archie-boy ! "

" The island's wrapped in haze," the engineer made answer. " Shouldn't wonder if it reaches out here a bit. I shouldn't bother about that if I were you . . . you've had a long bout. Eyes fogged in consequence . . . er . . . take a dram if I find it ? "

" What about poor old P. & O. ? "

" Done in if we can't fetch a doctor pretty soon. . . . "

This seemed to rouse Sinden's fleeting energies.

" We'll get there," he cackled, " if I have to get

out and push. You keep the mill running. . . . How about oil? Enough? Good! . . . Then let her rip, Archie-boy, and if we can't fetch, or a Hun gets up, we'll just open . . .” He paused and questioned with a singular jerk: “What about the wireless?”

“Done in, I'm afraid.”

“Can't be botched?”

“I'm still tinkering; but it was pretty well knocked to glory.”

“Right-o! Looks as though we'd got it in the neck, eh? Er . . . what's the dram?”

“Pick-me-up. Topping stuff! Pills gave it me last time we were alongside in case of . . . oh well, in case I needed it.”

“I'll take it if it kills me,” the commander decided.

“How long does it last?”

“Nuff to put us alongside.”

Archer disappeared and reappeared like one taking part in the comedy known as “Jack in the Box.”

“Here you are,” he cried. “Guzzle.”

Sinden drank, patted his chest, and looked up.

“Have got,” he whispered. “Now can do—what?”

At eleven o'clock, two days and several miserable hours beyond schedule, as they said, the *Cherrypicker* limped past Cape Irene and sent by semaphore a message which brought a destroyer racing to intercept her.

They met midway between the signal station and Cape Valanidla, which is at the foot of Mudros Bay. They were secure from the Huns at last. A short wagging of flags put the destroyer in touch with facts and brought a young lieutenant to Sinden's aid.

A commander with a jagged wound in the leg and a bandage across his eyes is scarcely in a condition to take his ship into the presence of his admiral. He

can do little but acquiesce in the orders given. Yet when the ship is tied up and he feels her nuzzling the buoy, he may demand to be the bearer of his own report, even when it is understood that the admiral is fuming.

For that reason, in spite of argument with a surgeon of acknowledged authority, when his wound had been dressed and his eyes bandaged afresh, the commander of the *Cherypicker* was guided over the ship's side and placed in a picket-boat which presently whipped him to the gangway of the flagship.

He climbed the ladder and stood a moment on the grating, stifling a desire to scream. He looked a mere boy now that his eyes were covered, infinitely pathetic in his blindness, hands outspread before him. Then the flag-lieutenant came swiftly to his aid and took him by the arm.

"That you, Armitage, old thing?" Sinden crooned.

"What's left of me," Armitage replied. "What have they been doing to you . . . shell burst?"

"Mist. Fog . . . God knows. Take me in before I forget." He limped nearer.

"Before you forget! Tcha! The Chief doesn't know you are—hurt. Let me explain."

"We were on the surface," Sinden urged. "I must see him."

Armitage noted the thrill in the man's voice and acquiesced. He reflected that this might be the means of putting the matter in a new light.

"Stand where you are," he said.

He moved on, opened a door, and entered.

"Lieutenant-Commander Sinden, sir . . . shall I bring him in?"

The C.-in-C. looked up from a heap of papers.

"At last!" he commented. "Yes—at once."

There was no mistaking the tone. Armitage

decided he had adopted the right course and led Sinden in.

Instantly the Commander-in-Chief was on his feet, pushing back his chair.

"Good God!" he said; "there was no word of this in the signal. What in the world were they thinking of to permit . . ."

"Afraid I was in fault there, sir," Sinden explained, limping on the flag-lieutenant's arm. "I felt I must explain why we were on the surface . . . rather long for a signal, sir."

The Commander-in-Chief drew a chair close. "Sit down," he said. "Call the fleet-surgeon, Armitage. Leave Sinden with me." He turned to the commander. "You gave me a devil of a shock," he said. "I have been sending you to Hades for the past three days . . . thought I should have to write you off as missing. What's wrong with your leg?"

"Flesh wound, sir—nothing much."

"Nothing, eh! Nothing wrong with your eyes either?"

"Eyes," Sinden faltered. "That is why we were on the surface . . . couldn't use the periscope, sir . . . I *had* to come up."

"And stay up? You mean you couldn't see? Had to run the gauntlet of the forts from Chenak? Good God!"

"Nothing else for it, sir. Had to stay down and peg out or come to the surface and chance it."

"Where was Lieutenant Larne?"

"Doubled up with enteritis . . . ghastly, down under."

"So you came to the surface, eh?"

The Commander-in-Chief pulled himself erect and walked slowly up and down the room. "Any difficulty with your sight then?"

"Blurred, sir . . . and when it wasn't blurred, spots, things that whirred, cracked and left me dark . . . but we got her through." A note of pride appeared, but swiftly faded with the next sentence. "Regret to have to report rather extensive damage, sir. Kelvin gone, worse luck. She was a beauty . . . could do most things except talk; but clean off about two feet above the deck. Poor old P. & O. got a bit of that . . ."

"How? I thought he was below."

"He felt a bit easier, sir, and came up to lend me a hand. We were over to the north'ard of mid-stream, going slow. I was afraid they would hear us knocking and pick us up if I let her go. Any one but the Turks would have wiped us out there. Perhaps they were short-handed . . . perhaps merciful . . . God knows! But Kum Kale made up for that—more Huns, there, sir, I think. They got on to us and let go. They did most things to us except sink us . . . jammed one of the planes, put a hole through the conning-tower . . . two men badly wounded, three slightly, Lieutenant Larnes severely . . ." Sinden swayed in his chair, pressed his hands across the bandage, and looked up to say "And—that's about all, sir, I think . . . except . . ."

Again he paused, drooping. The Commander-in-Chief halted before him and said gently: "You are dead-beat. . . . Yes—except what?"

"I was just wondering, sir, what it will be like, if . . . if they can't patch me up."

The door opened as he spoke to admit the fleet-surgeon and nurse. They crossed quietly, and the nurse stooped, took off the bandage, lighted a small lamp, and set out an ophthalmoscope on a small table while the surgeon spoke with the Commander-in-Chief.

Sinden recognised the note of preparation; but

he could not see. The foginess had vanished, and darkness had taken its place. He passed his hand across his eyes. True! They were unbandaged.

Hot and cold he sat in his chair praying for miracles, but none came. A curious indifference supervened. Criticism chased hope in his brain. He desired the whirr of catherine-wheels which sparked; but there were no catherine-wheels, no sparks—all dead vacuity, oppression.

Would they never commence? Must he sit for all time in this dull agony of apprehension, expecting blows, manipulation which would be torture . . . or would——

Suddenly he became aware the surgeon was bending over him, aware of a light touch which held his forehead, that the old pain had come back, that he was sinking through space.

He put out his hands and clutched air. . . . More he did not know.

Somewhere there was a drone as of a machine winging high overhead, or a dynamo running sleepily under sea . . . the *Cherry-picker's* dynamo, and they were on the bottom, struggling with a net, or a chain, or a mooring which had fouled a plane. Something tricky and unexpected belonging to this new era of warfare . . . the sneaking and cowardly under-sea method which had been invented by the Shaitan in his laboratory in hell. . . .

A voice interrupted here. . . . “Un-English . . . spume-driven from the south-east . . . the corner where lathes spin in blue flames and a spluttering as of magnesium light makes dim the sight of those who tend them.” Tenuous blue shades appeared, having no eyes, but liquid fire—where eyes should be. Tears

of fire dropped upon the whirring spindles—dust, flies, flame. . . .

Sinden scarcely moved. Sounds oppressed him. A jangle of voices rose in protest or in argument. He desired to stay them, but was powerless to move. He strove to rise from the chair ; but he had less strength, it appeared, than a child. He strove to speak ; but speech failed him. He was alone, slipping away . . . slipping he knew not whither. . . .

In truth there was no noise. No voice jangling with others. Only the soft pronouncement of the Fleet-Surgeon as he stood apart with the Commander-in-Chief. “Trachoma, sir. An old trouble. . . . Doubtless the strain of getting her back finished him.”

Somewhere out in the radiant sunlight a bugle sounded two G's, and presently a duty-boat sizzled out from the gangway carrying men to the shore.

ON THE FLEET.

From the rail I saw you tripping,
 Lightly tripping,
Like a snowflake falling slowly 'midst the sleet ;
And your feet it seemed were slipping,
 Nearly slipping,
As I crossed the deck to greet you on the Fleet.
Oh ! your eyes were lifted smiling,
 Sweetly smiling,
Like Venus glowing bright in evening heat ;
And your pose was just beguiling,
 Just beguiling,
And your cheeks the breeze had glazed with colour
 sweet.

Then I whispered, greatly daring,
 Chill with daring,
“ Are you really come to greet *me* in this sleet ? ”
For I saw the wardroom sharing,
 Quietly sharing,
All the brightness that you carried to the Fleet.

So I spoke like one prevailing,
 Yes—prevailing,
As a man may speak whose heart was at your feet ;
While it seemed that I was failing,
 Slowly failing,
Till you helped me throw those others on the Fleet.
Did you know you were enthralling,
 Just enthralling,
When I begged you to be mine and not to cheat ;
But to share a sailor's calling,
 Hold him falling,
That you gave your lips to mine there, on the Fleet ?

Then with summer swiftly gliding,
 Quickly gliding,
'Neath the willows in that home you made so sweet,
Did you guess what were the tidings,
 Clarion tidings,
That reached me as I sat there at your feet ;

That you put aside your writing,
 Joyous writing,
As I stumbled, puzzling now how I could cheat ;
Guessed you then that it was fighting,
 Ruthless fighting,
That called me on the instant to the Fleet ?

For I'd said it was a warning,
 Service warning,
Sent at intervals to make all things complete ;
Sent to call me, in the morning,
 Early morning,
To the grey-clad ships the Nation calls its Fleet ;

*Guessed you then that I was failing,
 Lying, failing,
At a moment when our life was just complete ;
That you clung in silence, paling,
 Slowly paling,
Till you slipped down there to cower at my feet ?*

Did you read the thought appalling,
 Dim, appalling,
Which oppressed me when I saw you there so sweet ;
That you said, "'Tis war they're calling,
 Loudly calling,
Through the greyness, through the storm-clouds from
 the Fleet ;

“ It is England who is stating,
Sternly stating,
Need of men and ships and guns adown the street ;
And I may not keep you waiting,
Tamely waiting,
When your heart has gone so swiftly to the Fleet.”

*Could you see these things, my darling,
Did you guess that I might burke,
Read me, charged with thought appalling,
As I walked with those who shirk,
That you whispered words enthralling,
Bending low your face so sweet—
“ It is England who is calling,
Just our Mother you will greet ” ?*

CHAPTER IX

THE RED ENSIGN

*Merchant Service.—Naval Reserve.—Volunteer Reserve.
—Fishermen.*

WHEN entering the China seas in the old days merchantmen looked to their gun-tackles, their boarding-pikes, cutlasses and small arms, lest pirates should catch them unprepared and seek to smother them with stink-pots. But in days when all the seas are infested by pirates carrying stink-pots of terrible power, merchant captains have gone into action without guns or any semblance of them.

It seemed to be taken for granted that the ships would fight, and they fought—usually with the ship's nose and the captain's wits for armament. Whether they came from ports which had issued warnings, or from ports so distant that they knew nothing of war till they came in touch with it, it was the same. They fought.

Sometimes it became essential to decide who in a polyglot crew would be master when an enemy appeared—so they fought to decide that, and the squareheads went down. In this way a ship was able to get into her stride, ready to win just that degree of fame for which the Merchant Service had languished—guns or no guns, steam or sail.

Early in the war I stood on a point of land overlooking the blue slope up which creep the ships when coming from southern seas—the slope which appears

so solemn and immense when you search it from a height . . . the passionate sea which shook the men who strove to hamper Columbus and the march of events.

It rolled there at my feet, tipped and slashed with foam, carrying on its bosom the argosies of modern days, submarines lurking beneath its splendid colouring.

To the east a harbour slept in the noonday sun ; to the west blue-grey hills, the green of wide fields hedged and orderly, the clustering hamlets which drowsed behind the town. Shadow lay on some, light on others. The land took new tints with every passing cloud. It was inspiring to watch even that ; but to the south lay the sea, which rolled and twisted and thundered, combing on cliffs under foot.

Both up and down the coast, as far as the eye could see, were headlands bathed in spray which sometimes leaped and threw great showers high to smother them. Off the Head seas broke in a fine flurry of wind-spun force. They seemed to threaten a quaking land, the hills that fronted them, all that green expanse. But the buttressed Head played with the torrent which strove to shake it—took the spray in hand, made pictures of it, and smiled at the fancies it wrought. It stood in a haze of colour, sun-warmed, prismatic, wonderful ; it stood again a moment draped in mist, aping the winter which was past ; it stood with laughter shaking it, the lighthouse white upon its crown, summer touching it—lighting that grey and mysterious cavern down there in the border-line of foam.

At the signal station a pennant flew at half-mast, whipping the wind which had decided to fray it. In the offing were vessels—steamers, coasters, a couple of four-masters, a great ship leaning down before the

gale, and far away over the slope a giant of the Atlantic which the coastguard could name from the colour of her smoke.

There was a fresh breeze in Channel—that is all. Some of the vessels which creep from immense distances to feed England were in the danger zone and near a port of call. In the bay were others, lying at anchor, awaiting the nation's orders ; waiting to learn which of the teeming centres most needed the grain they carried—whether some ring had cornered it and it would go to fill granaries which eventually would feed Germany.

The port of call lay up wind in the blue haze, a line of headlands stepped in foam pointing the way.

The coastguard at my elbow made a movement, and I saw that he had put down his glass and was hoisting a pennant. "She's signalling her name," he explained. "Grain ship from Oregon. 'Report me all well'—so she says."

The ship attracted me ; but I made no comment. I was a greenhorn from beyond, taking the air.

Like the rocks she approached, the ship was bathed in foam. She leaned over with the full weight of the gale on her starboard quarter, every stitch drawing—yet she dragged. The seas ran past her as the surf runs past a boat which is being beached. She seemed to slip back upon them, to put down her counter as though she would use it for a scoop.

As she drew near we saw that two men were at her wheel, which seemed unnecessary until we saw her yaw ; saw that her deck was white with a full tide, precisely as her hull was white and scumbled by the seas. She was so washed that it appeared she must have spoken with a submarine ; but the coastguard refused this as he took in further messages from her flags. He knew too much of submarines,

he said without speech, to be switched off the track like that by a mere stranger—a person obviously belonging to the smug crowd known as “shore-loafers.”

“She’s deep,” he admitted; “but, then, they’re all deep these days. Got to be. Got to carry a batty of cargo if we’re goin’ to out them U-boats. Deep!”—he shrugged it for my benefit; “better be in a destroyer an’ ’a’ done with it. You can batten them down—but ’er!” He closed his glass with a snap and leaned forward, shaking one finger at the ship. “Better get in out of it,” he cried. “It’s goin’ to blow, an’ you ain’t fit to stand it. Get away in out of it, my son, an’ ’av a sleep.”

He did not say why she was unable to stand it, but entered the telegraph-room to click out his news. I recognised that he had told me exactly all that could be expected.

The ship creamed on, slashing amid seas that drew foam-pictures about her, precisely as about the rocks we footed. She came abreast, all sail set, a sight to inspire the painter, the poet; then, with her ensign slowly coming to the taffrail, she moved up Channel, rolling sometimes, bending always, foam to the eyes, foam rushing in her wake to strangle her.

Staring through my glasses I could see her crew amid the deck wash, and farther aft it seemed was splintered ironwork. In an hour only her royals and top-gallant sails were visible; in another the harbour had swallowed her. Then, as I was interested, I rode down to see her there, where she lay awaiting the nation’s pleasure.

Foam no longer hissed on either side of her. Her sails were bundled rather than stowed; her rigging slack, her yards awry. I came near and saw a grimy

side from which grass trailed and sluppered in the swell. As the water left it there came a long-drawn hiss as of snakes, a succulent, spluttering sound in the background. A boat occupied by four men worked with scrapers and brooms when the sea so willed it. On deck pumps were at work, handles swinging without song.

I climbed the ship's gangway and reached the poop. A tall, sun-browned officer took me round. I tried to draw him out; but he had little to tell of the southern seas, less of strange lands—nothing, indeed, but the reiterated decision to get out of it, as he put it, as soon as the war was over. Then, because it seemed essential, I asked him what sort of passage he had had, and he threw back over his shoulder:

“It wasn't a passage. It was hell.”

“Submarines?” I asked, judging I might.

“Not at first. Seas.”

He looked up with that: “We are loaded down these days worse than before. Have to if we are to keep you fellows fed. . . . I'm not complaining. I am just stating facts . . . and off the Horn we were gutted—galley, engine-room, fo'c'sle, all swept clean out of her. A longboat went when the house went. It took off two of our hands with it; two others got splayed—but we mended them.”

“What about that hole?” I asked, pointing.
“You don't mean to tell me the sea did that.”

“What would be the use?” he jerked. “No—we got that about two hundred and fifty miles west of this yesterday. We thought we were through the danger zone and were beginning to crow—stupidly, of course. Not that that had anything to do with our getting plugged. That was chance, Joss—anything you like. The beast happened to be there, and

we had no guns . . . afraid to ship them for fear of the pacifists, damn them ! . . .”

He eyed me in a questioning fashion—not sure, perhaps.

“ I’d like to be at one of their meetings. I should break something,” he added suddenly. “ So—er—as we were in the beast’s way, we got what for. Shells—a sort of whizz-bang that made us squirm—then, just as we were for throwing it up, along came one of our patrols out of nowhere to join us.

“ He lost no time. Saved us for what we are worth . . . but he couldn’t give us back our skipper and two hands. Their numbers were up . . . and—oh, well, I believe I have the pleasure of taking her home. Won’t be easy, either, now we are short-handed as well as gutted . . . gives long odds to the U-boat if we get caught on the home stretch.”

He glanced around. The wind hummed high in the rigging.

“ I shall come out of her when I get there,” he said. “ Find a job mine-sweeping, perhaps, for the rest of the war. . . . After that, God knows. There’s no money in it . . . no future unless they alter things . . . nothing to leave if we get caught. No pension—nothing saved for those we leave behind. That stings a man. It means either starvation or charity for the wife and kids . . . unless . . . unless you like to go hat in hand to your damned owner and plead for his . . .”

He paused and looked me in the face. “ Still uncertain ? ” I questioned.

“ It doesn’t seem quite fair, does it ? ” he asked, smiling.

And in the cabin we presently stood beside three forms, rigid, silent under their coverings. Near at

hand were the flags with which presently we would deck them.

Again, when we were outside, he turned to me, anger intensified by contact with his dead :

"I don't see why it should come to charity." (He returned to that without apology.) "Weren't they good men? *We* brought the ship in because *they* stuck it out . . . otherwise she would have been down the cellar. . . . Why should they come on charity? Weren't they men?"

He required no comment from me, but continued in the biting tones of one who has considered long under the stars, in the midst of a vast loneliness, and has arrived at definite opinions.

"As far as I understand things, it just remains for us to refuse to take ships out of dock," he said, "to bring folk to their bearings. It would not be much use any one else fighting. You would starve. The Army would starve. The Navy couldn't help you. . . .

"Very well. Then it *is* National Service we are on, isn't it . . . ? And if it is, why should the wife and kids be compelled to accept charity when we go up ; why should we be asked to accept charity if we lose a leg or arm ; why, if we are taken prisoner or interned, should the maximum payment for wife and little ones be a pound a week ? " The phrases poured out now. He required no urging. "How far will a pound go among three or four ? Our pay ceases when our ship is sunk. Anything we may receive after that is by the grace of some one or other—Society perhaps.

"My skipper hated the system—so do I : but now he is dead, and those who are left must take it or starve. . . . Fair, isn't it ? Calculated to bring men flocking to run your ships . . . and, mind you,

where there is a pension, as in some of the big lines there is, it comes to a man"—he swept the decks with his hand—"by grace of his directors—not because it is due."

He looked me in the face. "You asked my opinion," he said more quietly, "and you have got it. Stick it in your book or whatever it is you are writing, if you can. Say I said it—and, in case there are any galoots who think *we are likely to strike and let them starve*, tell them that that part was just my gas."

These things occurred during the first U-boat campaign, and I have set them down as he desired because they were true then, but never in the future must be true.

There were those who, when war broke out, prophesied a general tying up of shipping on the ground that men would not be got to face the U-boat peril. That was the German theory also. But the Merchant Service speedily made plain its attitude. Even the tragedy of Captain Fryatt failed to shake it. Men tumbled over each other to get shipped. Torpedoings failed to stop them. Frightfulness made them keener, and when at length guns were provided, although they saw them mounted on the taffrail instead of the bow, the eagerness was intensified.

Out of all this a change has come. The nation now understands its sailors as never before in history. It is called the Merchant Navy to-day, but it will emerge the National Marine, which will work in some fashion as did that fine service we once knew as the Royal Indian Marine . . . affiliated to the Navy perhaps, but not governed by the Navy. It must have its own Board—its Minister, if need be ; its own uniform ; its own honours ; its own standing ;

its own Courts and pension schemes. Pangbourne has come ; the *Worcester*, *Conway*, and *Port Jackson* are still with us and should be able to provide for the training of officers ; while the various existing establishments can be made sufficient for the petty officers and men necessary to man the ships.

No more stilettoes, no more ringletted organ-grinders for the National Marine. Cabins instead of barns, messrooms, crews who speak English—these are some of the matters awaiting the end of the war which the Merchant Service has earned.

Everybody has heard of the R.N.R. in these days ; but once it was not so. They are the captains, officers, and men of the mail services and liners of the Merchant Service, whom we used to watch on Mount Misery shooting the sun and talking azimuths, or, as quarter-masters' and bo'suns' mates, answering to the whistle of the officers. There was a day when these officers used to take the head of the tables in the saloons and were known to the passengers ; but since mail ships became castellated structures, more like an hotel than a ship, the officers have had their own quarters, their own mess.

They are the men who were drafted into the Navy on mobilisation, and are now known to the Senior Service, half affectionately, half satirically, as the "Curly Gang" and to "G. F.," in his book on naval doings, as "Sinbads."

Sinbad, as every one remembers, was a sailor, and his twentieth century prototype should have been competent to read the barometer without making a fleet smile ; yet it seems he could not. Perhaps that particular Sinbad was suffering under the weight of his wiggle-waggle bands, but in any case I am sure the Navy proved a competent coach.

Now the Curly Gang suggests ruffianism, though in reality it is just comment on the order which bids him wear curlicues instead of plain gold bands on his cuffs and on the shoulder-strap of his overcoats.

I fancy the R.N.R. like neither the sobriquet nor the stripe. Undoubtedly the stripe hurts most. It is the old badge at which we laughed years ago. We called it a "plaited anachronism," and did not dream it would ever see service *pari passu* with the broad bands and trim curl of the Navy in action; yet it has. In any case, it is too marked a variant of the naval uniform for men who take their watch on battleships, cruisers, T.B.D.'s, scouts or submarines, turn and turn with officers of the R.N. And when considering it from the point of view of enemy treatment, in case a man is made prisoner, it is still less wise.

The R.N.V.R. men, though as a rule they are not sailors in the same sense as the R.N.R.'s, are scarcely hit so hard. Apparently they do not count among the Curly Gang, for their stripe is again different. The R.N.V.R. is zig-zag, thus :



The R.N.R. curly, thus, like sennit :



Three rows of this curly arrangement means commander, four captain; but you cannot make gold lace look neat when you crinkle it. How is it possible? Even a steam hammer would fail here.

This question of uniform of the R.N.R. officers was the only one on which any sort of feeling was aroused. In all else the two services worked together as one, vieing, if possible, one with the other in recognition of each other's points. Nor did I come

across any officer either in the R.N.R. or R.N.V.R. who seemed likely to be unable to read the barometer.

What I did learn from naval officers, from admiral to lieutenant, was a generous appreciation of the work of both, of a desire to perpetuate the kinship which had been reborn under the hammer blows of 15-inch guns and Q.F.'s. It had brought the two services once more to the old comradeship of Elizabethan wars. Then they stood as they stand now, shoulder to shoulder in defence of the nation—in defence of the right. Then they defeated, as to-day they defeat, the enemy squadrons when they appear. But one feature is eclipsed for all time. There are no ding-dong fights. A scrap, as we term it, is to-day an affair of minutes, fought between vessels which often are dots to each other, 10,000, 20,000 yards distant, and when it is finished the victor is alone on the sea.

I like to remember these men of the R.N.R. as I saw them working with their pals in the Navy. Fine, sunny days stood over us just then; "beef trips," "stunts," and the long-drawn business of attracting the enemy were in being. Sometimes the ships came back cock-a-whoop, but more often depressed after spreading toils which the Hun refused to see. Often, again, with that reply on their lips, I heard an admiral pass to Whitehall.

"I had to turn back for the same reason as on former occasions. Tell the First Lord."

Nothing more; but behind this waiting and watching is a strain which can scarcely be conveyed by words, for those who order events. My admiral had been up all night. He had been at work all day before, and he was at work still. Truly man pays for the depth and number of the stripes he wears on his sleeve.

I like to remember, in connection with these days of sun and alternating mist, those men of the R.N.R. who once more were in the Service I have called my old Service. They are roaming the seas still. They have shone in action and on patrol duty. They gave us the splendid lesson early in the war of what to do when a raider challenges. The *Ortega* made answer: "Every one in the stokehold." Strip, fire, wheel coal; while on the bridge they sought amidst the pinnacles and snow fortresses of southern Cordillera for the entrance to Smyth's Channel—took it at a bound and passed its tortuous length, sounding, taking cross-bearings, until Cape Pillar and the Magellan appeared. It was conceivable, of course, that the *Leipzig* would have gone down outside the fringe of islands he dared not enter; but he was not in Magellan and the *Ortega* was safe. Other instances appear. The history of the great Services which may be written in the future should be, to those who follow us, what Marryat, Anson, and Cook were to us.

Long days of intense interest were those when sometimes a bay screened us, sometimes the fine bends of a singularly beautiful river, sometimes the North Sea with its constantly flickering light, its grey-greens, its grey-yellows, and the heaving lumpiness which set us rolling . . . days when Hun raiders showered bombs from the skies and strove to wipe us out; but never, in all the long months of my acquaintance, showed a prow to our shores, fired a gun outside the wet triangle, or accepted the challenge of live bait.

Men of the R.N.V.R., or the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, are in rather a different category. They are to be met not only on the ships, but at Admiralty,

on the staff at various centres and as dagger-men, specialising in some department of this omnivorous war. Language claims some, science, chemistry, wireless, decoding others, in addition to those who are definitely assigned posts in the various executive branches.

Here is a man with a red stripe running beneath his zig-zag—he is a surgeon, often a mere boy; another with a white stripe below the gold—he is in the paymaster branch, and may be a linguist; purple beneath the gold—he finds his duty below deck in the land of steam amidst the thrum of machines running at enormous velocity; pale blue—he is of the naval instructors, and may be the terror who frowns on the doings of that boy of yours who has recently earned the white patch . . . or he may be engaged in translating sentences in Sanscrit or Arabic or Czech . . . or, most difficult of all, finding what meaning lies behind certain words from the “*Gottterdammerung*” of Wagner.

The R.N.V.R.'s are men who, in the piping days we have lost, were yachtsmen, dabblers in sea lore, boatmen, fishermen of the leisured brand; men who may still own a country house in addition to a yacht and chambers in the Albany. They may be millionaires; but you would not think it possible if you saw them going out in charge of a patrol-boat or mine-sweeper, until by chance you heard them speak; they may be professors or dons or simple persons who in the old days seemed too bored to look happy; they may be of any conceivable rank or calling; they may possibly have sunk even to the depths in the production of *belles lettres*; they may be poets or historians or novelists—but they have blood in their veins, youth on their side, a fine recognition of their responsibilities . . . and some

of those who have gone from their ranks have left the world poorer in all but that one quality which they gave instantly—*Example*.

I have met them so wrapped that one could not discover their rank ; so grimed that they looked like coal-heavers, boiler-makers, any calling which is dirty and laborious ; which causes lines to come in the faces of the young, hardens their hands and brings snapped orders. . . . But they have been returning from patrol on the North Sea, or were weary after long vigil over a submarine, or wet and bedraggled after towing a stray mine till daylight permitted its dispatch.

You remember, or have you heard, of the case of that lieutenant of the R.N.V.R. who happened on a drifting mine when he was in charge of a M.L. ?

It was blowing half a gale and night was drawing its curtain over both mine and launch : a night of North Sea rigour ; seas rolling out of the ineffable blur of an horizon long ago vanished ; wind mourning ; the M.L. lurching, climbing, falling into the holes which the seas had sucked out there in the wilderness which was her beat.

Every sort of difficulty lay in the way of these men, all odds on the mine. . . . But it is not wise to leave a drifting mine at large. You may come upon it next when it is a trifle submerged, hidden by the spume ; or your pal may meet it and go up in a second of red force ; or it may drift until it reaches an estuary, creep up river, and frighten the sleepers.

Usually a mine, when it is caught, is slaughtered by rifle or Q.F. ; but that predicates daylight, some degree of quiet, and here was none. Yet it had to be captured, harnessed if you will, to the stern of the M.L. and put out of action.

A boat was lowered—pitched into the sea is the phrase—from a craft so small as an M.L. and manned. Two men pulling, one steering, the lieutenant in the nose of her, line in hand. They rowed in the growing dusk, came near and lay to. Only a fool would go close to a mine in a seaway—with a boat. A touch on one of the grim horns which stuck out, and the end had come for boat and crew, a red flare, sudden, tremendous—and silence. But R.N.V.R., if he could not read the barometer, could harness a mine. He slipped over side, line in hand, and swam where a boat dared not row; he came to the slimed horns of the thing, but could not touch them. One pictures him treading water, holding back from the drift as the mine oscillated and bubbled in the foam, trying to reach him, calling out to his boat's crew to keep back—and in a moment of exaltation reaching out as the ring with which it is crowned swerved near. Then one sees him reeving his line in it and swimming back to his boat as a man swims from the shark which he knows is upon him. Years pass in those moments. Laughter surges in upon you; sweat pours as you climb to your boat. Are you whole? Is the thing done? What about that left arm?

Then when you know it is done you sit down and rub down, smoking the cigarette some pal has stuck in your lips, and would not change rank with your admiral.

I came upon a skipper of Scotland who wore His Majesty's uniform and marched with me up and down beneath the white ensign for an hour or more. Before the war he had shot trawls and scooped fish for the hungry; now he scooped mines and shot them for his country.

He was proud of the flag which flew overhead, proud of his badge, proud that he had been told to

speaking freely to the Sassenach who accompanied him and seemed puzzled by the vernacular; prouder when, at the end of our talk, he assured him he "had gien naethin' ava."

He was right. He had not. A newspaper man from the States might have drawn him. I think he understood my English accent, as an American friend once called it, as well or as ill as I understood his braw Scottish.

I can see the twinkle with which that statement of rectitude fell—the blue eyes half hidden, the strong mouth broadening to a smile, the crisp sandy beard and moustache which nearly hid his features; and I remember his answer when I asked what brought him there sweeping for mines. He said that he came fra Drumtochty; but I felt that scarcely explained it. I asked when he had joined up, and he said, "Drumtochty lay to the east o' Nairn which maybe I kenned wass on Moray Firth"—only the "r" rolled—"ae long way no'th."

Even this did not answer my question, so I returned to it by asking how long he had been sweeping mines in the North Sea.

Again came the twinkle. "Sin th' war started," he decided.

I expressed my appreciation of what I knew, from others, were very gallant services. I said the country was proud of the fishermen, and he looked up astonished.

"There wass naethin' else a body could dae," he explained, "seein' we wass no wim-men."

This was so obvious that I gave him his head and he took me at once to look at his wireless cabin—which was sown thick with shavings, sprinkled with workmen plotting tables, shelves and drilling holes for the apparatus which was to come. He pointed

out where the operator would sit, how his chair would be clampit, where the wires would come in, how it would be possible to talk to the bridge, where the operator would sleep when he had time, and what it would all look like when it was finished.

Then we went to the bridge, where he explained how orders were passed, where he stood when on watch, where he slept, in the charthouse wheel-house at odd times. The settee was a locker. He did not say what was in it—because, perhaps, it is well to leave something to imagination. He explained that charts were not of much service, as he could find his way, he and all other skippers worth considering, by the colour o' the sea, an' the sound it made—he called it yap. He showed me that it was mere prejudice to be enamoured o' charts. If he did not know where he was, an unlikely condection, he put a lump o' lead o'er side an' feeled. He could find his way about the North Sea as well as most folk kenned hoo tae get ta the nearest public. What for shouldn't he . . . had he no been sailin' an' galumphin' up an' doon its length an' its bre'th sin he wass breeched?

From that the descent to armament was a glissade. He spoke figuratively in whispers. . . . Yon wass ae bomb o' sorts—he did not explain which—that wull make ae submarine gae up if it happens on her . . . an' yon wass ae bomb—he pointed to it, leaning over the taffrail—which would make her gae doon wi-oot the tricksy thing coming a-nigh haund her . . . an' yon wass ae rifle wi which ye put mines oot o' the way. An' yon, he explained in a glorious blend of Gaelic and Saxon, wass a machine gun o' pairts which had dune thee trick, once, twice—maybe twice, wi'oot turnin' ae hair.

But of his method of sweeping he said nothing. Who

was his opposite number when they headed the tide for their catch was his secret. How he rigged his sweep, kept it thrust so deep and no deeper . . . how he knew when a mine was captured, how it came to the surface, was between himself and his commodore, and the less said to southern loons the better for the Service.

I agree. Even those of us who handle the pen more readily than the sword may put plans in our pockets and fly to the place where the *Pickelhaube* can provide us with our thirty pieces of silver.

We clambered from the gun platform and made for the cabin, where he showed me his bunk, the shutters he could draw when it was cold, the picture of his wife and five bairns all grouped and in *negligée* attitudes, the place where the charts were kept.

He showed me the engine-room, the platters and cups of the mess, and sat me down *vis-à-vis* across the small table while he opened his mind. The carpenters had gone home to dinner. I listened. I could do no less.

You see there had been one of those exhibitions of frightfulness and stupidity which have come to be termed a tip-and-run raid, and the papers were full of certain damage which had been done to a town in our neighbourhood. The cabbage patch thereabouts had been holed a wee. . . . I am giving his version, but not his phrasing nor the modulations and invective of his words—for these things are beyond all power in written speech. . . . It appeared, further, and this was where the sting came, that a deputation of mayors had gone to London to lay the towns' case before His Majesty's Ministers. Some poor folk, I gathered, "had been scratchit," presumably outside the cabbage patch, "and, if that sort of thing was to be happenin' an' men blamed for

permeetin' it . . . it wull be necessaire tae gie us a loup more craft f'r patrol."

I pictured the small vessels strung out from Scapa Floe to the Foreland and whistled.

"Hun'nards," he announced; then with a swift turn: "Hoo can ye help it? If ae man builds ae hoose on the end of ae pier stickin' oot into the No'th Sea, an' fills it wi wummen an' childer, he's like tae get scratchit . . . are we no at war? . . .

"An' hoo do they coom . . . hoo lang do they stay? Full speed tae the shallows is their game—in ae fog for choice—stop; blaze off the shells, an' full speed back tae their holes—yaupin'. . . . Hoo can ye stop it? Ye canna. That's flat."

He showed signs of slowing down. I felt that the moment had come to shake hands. He said he had been verra pleased ta make my acquaint . . . and left it there.

I followed my orderly who brought me to the lieutenant who had plotted this chat. With him I trailed down the sheds, looking at gear and the men who patiently disentangled it; watched girls deftly turning out fuses and other weird methods which have come into fashion for filling old Charon's boat; came to a standstill and learned that my skipper was a V.C. But of his exploit the world was dumb.

I think that is typical of these men who jumped from the trawl and driftnets into the red roar of this war. Unprepared as the rest of us, they came to their duties; marched and crowed and swore and joked, learning under the eye of an admiral how to shoot; how to sweep for mines, what part of the devilish mechanism might be touched with impunity, what part at a crew's peril; how to blink signals, flag-wag, salute and stand at attention . . . how to honour the flag which for years all spouters "desiring

to impress the masses " termed a rag. What it stood for. What was honour. What perfidy.

Shotley saw them drilling, Lowestoft, Yarmouth—a dozen ports facing the cold North Sea they knew so well. Saw them making headway against the old shibboleths, against the old hatred of discipline, against *laissez-faire* and the stupid doctrines of a too pungent Socialism.

CHAPTER X

TRANSPORT

The Gathering of the Clans.—A Naval Screen.—A Call from Cocos.—“Emden.”—The Cornstalks’ Greeting.

BEHIND gnarled rocks which form the south-western barrier of Australia is the harbour which saw the gathering of our kinsmen in the Southern Ocean: Albany its name; King George’s Sound the waterway by which you approach it from the sea. West and south of it are the rocks flung up deep in the mist and steam of throes which hammered into shape *Terra Australis*. To the east and north of it the arid plains which fringe the Great Australian Bight, the graves of pioneers, Coolgardie the golden desert, and the “great divide” of an island continent. West of it is Cape Leeuwin, the Lioness, named after the ship of the Dutch navigator who discovered it—a headland ranking with Cape Horn for the strength of its gales and for the mountainous swing of its seas.

The harbour has been termed the key of Australia,* and you come upon it from the east without guessing its extent. Breaksea Island nearly shuts the gate upon it. Farther up the sound is another barrier where the waterway dwindles to a few hundred yards. The coast is but a series of capes and promontories, mile beyond mile, black-slimed, stern as the Magellans

* Sir Peter Scratchley.

where Cape Pillar looks out upon the Pacific and holds its seas in check.

You enter the strait which leads from the sound and instantly are in a new world. Green hills confront you, a long sloping valley which sweeps up and up until it is lost in the blue distance of the Porongorup Range. The bay smiles upon the town, the town lies snugly facing it.

Until the great war spoke in terms which could not be misread, Albany had seen no argosies to stir its blood and raise the problem of sea-power. In common with the other States, Western Australia had been concerned with its trade and the question of a white Australia; but now it seemed possible other nations envied it its acres, its place in the sun, its open spaces, and would challenge the right of those who held it.

With von Spee at large after various chasings in the Pacific, the *Emden*, *Königsberg*, and other cruisers seeking beatification at the hands of an all-powerful War-Lord, a new perspective dawned. Men began to think. A glimmer of the Grand Fleet holding the gate against German aggression came in. A suggestion of the force that would be necessary to accomplish this, far off as it was, crept in, and it was seen that Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and all the jewels which go to make the Empire's Crown, were screened up there amidst the mists and blizzards of the North Sea.

Yet even then it was not entirely understood. Weeks passed. The tale of hazard far off, expressed in curt cables, enlightened no one. But kinsmen were glowing already. They knew enough. They saw the boys thronging to the recruiting booths, heard the crash of preparation and guessed the rest.

Then one day ships began to assemble in the bay

below Albany and the townsfolk could look down from their Marine Drive, marvel or not, as they chose, at the fleet which slowly grew under their eyes.

Transports came in crammed to the rail with cheering Anzacs, as they were presently called. Cruisers which had never before been seen in Australian waters arrived from dim space to protect them. The fortifications of their wonderful harbour had been overhauled, and soldiers who seemed to have sprung from the sea were there to man the guns. Then, upon the flat surface of the bay they knew so well, other transports crammed with troops who might not land crept in from the east; boys in a rather different kit,² but of the same hue, and a hat which was not tilted on one side. These presently became known for New Zealanders, and with them came colliers that stole in deep and went out like tanks, nose in air.

And as the fleet grew the attendant fleet increased in number and importance. There were launches, water-boats, beef-boats, picket-boats—a crowd of midgets all busy and clamorous with the throb of war. And so, by slow degrees, men learned to understand what they owed to the grey ships which rarely are seen, seldom are heard, which held Germany penned within the triangle of her own grey forts.

To the ends of the earth the power of the Fleet was felt. Without it there could be no cruiser squadron in the bay, no transports. South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand would each be isolated from the world and from each other. No movement of troops over-seas would have been possible. Each State would have required its men and its ships, and would have succumbed in detail to the attack of Germany.

Instead of that here was an armada all *cap-d-pie* to take part in the war in Europe ; von Spee turned from the conquest of Australia by the British Eastern Squadron acting in conjunction with Japan . . . Japan the bugbear of Australian Statesmen, the one possible enemy who, in old days, had dominated Australian thought ; who must be thwarted, held off, beaten if it came to that . . . and here was Japan helping to pin down Germany.

It appeared presently that a Japanese cruiser was among the ships lying in the bay. It was said that she would form part of the escort and had but lately returned from chasing von Spee in the Pacific. Now he was bound east, and Japan considered it possible Australia would hear of him. Afterwards it seemed that this strange cruiser was bandying talk with British cruisers, making bets as to who of them would round up the *Emden*. The folk looked down upon the ships commenting on these facts and saw that certain of them were verified. There, for instance, throbbing at the pier, was a Japanese picket-boat. Her crew had been seen about the steps—Japs every man of them. The ship had been seen by those who went out on steamers to cheer the troops as they came in. Her flag, with the curious oblique bars, was hoisted exactly as the flags of England and Australia were hoisted each day at eight o'clock.

It was a new world—a world once again in the throes : rushed thither by the rush of Hun tribesmen brandishing frightfulness and seeking a place in the sun.

Australia had been apportioned, so it was whispered. Estates had been mapped out and set against the name of this or that magnate who itched for possession. *Vons* and would-be *vons* from the pack who

helped the War-Lord win would come in when it was all done with and take their toll in the German way. The stutterings of countless *manchen* in Australia's midst left no room for doubt on that.

Therefore the island continent thrilled and saw visions of death and disablement with the equanimity of men drilled to battle. The dominance which had seemed possible was in the nature of peaceful penetration; but this new dominance and over-lordship was to be forced upon them with all the engines of war. Australia and New Zealand would lie as Belgium lay after a month of it. The streets of Melbourne, Sydney, Wellington, Hobart would echo to cries other than those of picnic parties; they would run red, and the Germans who had lived on terms of friendship with British citizens would help to strike. The beautiful flag that was theirs would go down in the onslaught, and the black Cross of Frightfulness would take its place.

So much, after months of warfare in Europe and the patient waiting of the Fleet which kept the Empire whole, was discernible to those who dwelt beneath the Southern Cross. From Cape Leeuwin to Torres Straits, from Auckland to Dunedin, ran the phrase: "The Fleet stands fast; praise we the Fleet!"

So Albany watched the coming of transport upon transport, cheered them as they entered, cheered them while they stayed; saw the New Zealanders, clean-faced men from that marvellous England of the farther deep; heard the bugles, heard the drums . . . learned their meaning, knew that death and wounds would ensue, and cheered the lads who faced them.

Thirty-two transports lay in that land-locked harbour the night before this twentieth century Armada sailed. Sir Galahad was there, crusaders

not a few, *Desdichados*, knights who kept their visors closed you may be sure, New Chums aching to see London again, Cornstalks who would see it and die happy—all the world indeed, phrase it as we will, ready to fight, and fall if need be, so that a sight of the chalk cliffs and the little, patterned fields of England had first been theirs.

Forty thousand men were there, with horse and guns, ambulance, stores, forage, *en route* for England, for the mud and slime of the Flanders front, to meet Germany upon the battlefields of Europe—and the sun smiled upon the bay that held them.

A fleet for the Hun to sink if he could reach it; troops on board, every button fastened, ready to face Cape Leeuwin and such raiders as still remained to be swept into the net of those who trawled—and the sun, sinking behind the western hills, painted it red, smiled upon it and went out.

Across the bay for the last time a bugle rang. Flags came down. Lights went up. The blue ranges of Porongorup would be there when the sun set to-morrow; but the men craning neck over rails and booms would not see the shadows lengthen, nor the light which stole across them when the sun went down. They would be passing up a flat and rather dreary coast, the Leeuwin astern, Cocos ahead. Soldiers would be keeping themselves fit; horses acquiring the knack of walking on matting—busy, every soul of them, and full of hope.

But Albany would be quiet now the ships were gone—still, wondrously still, now that the coursing torrent no longer sang of men and of arms.

There were those who remained awake all night that they might be up to catch the first stir at dawn. There were those who slept the last night they would know of peace until their Galahads and *Desdichados*

returned to cheer them. There were those who recognised their sun had set for ever . . . but not one who would have stayed the armada which carried men seaward.

Secure in the knowledge that the Grand Fleet held the gates barred, in triple column abreast, the ships moved up the coast. A cruiser of the Imperial Navy led the van, another brought up the rear. On either hand two cruisers steamed in contact with the troop-ships, Japan leading on the starboard side, H.M.A.S. *Sydney* on the port. They moved in stately formation heading for the north, confident in their ability to compass the errand on which they were set. Orders came from the leader, promptings sometimes, signals which recalled a straggler to the necessity of station keeping. Now that leader was near at hand, now sunk in haze—they doubted nothing.

The Leeuwin had been kind to them. D'Entrecasteau and all the dim, iron headlands which once had appeared to threaten were far astern. The sun shone. It was clear. The iron rails on which men leaned were hot to the touch. On the starboard hand was a fringe of reefs, emerald and topaz in the glare, and above it all the deep blue slope of heavens which ringed them in.

Troops lined the rails in dog-watches of perfect quietude. They sang of the old home and of the test which presently would be theirs. The slopes of the Dandenong and delights of sailing up Russeutter Bay had never been more alluring. They sang the song which pleads for aid to keep the home fires burning, saw the sun sink, the stars peep out, the mirror which carried them aglow with twinkling lights—and went at the bugle's call to the troop deck where they slept unstirred by doubt.

The *Argyleshire*, one of the cracks, moved second in the starboard line, packed with men and horses. Gunners these of the Victorian contingent and their teams. On her starboard hand was the Japanese cruiser which had stirred chords at Albany and elsewhere on her way thither. Unless you knew her to be of the Land of the Rising Sun, you would have passed her as British, so like was she in all externals.

For the first three days the armada hugged the coast, as though loath to leave it; but from Géographie Channel, or thereabouts, it headed away for the Cocos. They would pass to the east and so keep in closer touch with the squadrons which searched for the elusive *Emden*. Meanwhile it spoke with Australia when necessary, kept wireless under control, and hummed over tropic seas immersed in the duty of keeping fit.

"Stables" began the day for the troops on those ships which carried horses. Barriers came down, the teams were taken out, groomed and led round and round the ship's decks on matting spread for their ease. Space resounded with tramping hoofs, the quick, surprised neigh of wild things amidst new surroundings, to the capers of some, the dignified champing of the less skittish. A brisk scene in the brisk airiness of early morning, man and beast rollicking in water, the hose hissing, popping, while the sun grew steadily in power. Then garish day over all. Rounds, inspections, drills, games, the sun nearly vertical at noon, awnings flapping lazily where the breeze caught them and the flat expanse which ringed them all in scintillating in the hot air.

To Jackson of the Melbourne battalion, an officer who had exchanged from home garrison duty to see life with gunners in France, these early hours were the most fascinating of the day.

The ships trailed out in column of line abreast like beads upon a string, the sternmost ships hidden by the smoke of those which led. One had freedom for a time from discipline, and could dabble barefoot in the water that rushed from the hose. Then came coffee and a slice of buttered toast, one joked with the man who brought it, watched the gleaming sea, and afterwards smoked a cigarette which the gods had fashioned while one slept.

The *Argyleshire* moved so steadily through this gorgeous stretch, the cruisers looked so ready to intercept all hazard, the routine moved so sedately now it was in being and Australia a memory, that it seemed impossible war was out there in the north and that they advanced to take part in it.

Then one morning as they drew near the Cocos, Jackson, leaning over the rail, saw the Japanese cruiser, which hitherto had shown no signs of madness, alter her course a whole handful of degrees, and come foaming as though she would ram the staid trooper.

He looked up. On the bridge a man was waving flags in the orthodox way, and a signal climbing to the short yardarm. The ship's officers were using glasses. The captain standing rigid at the wing, his eyes sidelong upon the cruiser. A group congregated beneath the bridge. Comment ran up and down the scale, in the short, clipped sentences of to-day.

"Got a bee in his bonnet," one joked.

"Hari-kari looks more like it."

"Yep."

"Hallo! What's come to the *Sydney*?"

The *Sydney*, far on the port bow beyond those tiers of troopers, seemed to be smothered in smoke.

"Fire?" one questioned.

"In her stokehold," quoth one who could read

"She's drawing out of station . . . she's going hell for leather on her own."

The Japanese cruiser, flags down, foam to her eyes, came swiftly across heading for the *Argyleshire's* bow. The group looked up. The captain still stood as before, his legs a little apart, his eyes sidelong on the cruiser.

"She'll hit for a dollar," a lieutenant guessed. He patted his tunic: "Got my safety on anyway."

But she did not hit. She skimmed the big trooper's bow, smothered all hands with smoke poured from her raked funnels, and danced into the sunpath in the wake of *Sydney*.

An hour later it was seen that she returned; but the *Sydney* was then a mere blob of confused smoke far away on the horizon, heading at full speed for the Cocos.

Then suddenly an order went down the lines which brought the ships to a standstill. They kept station, but seemed content to loll upon the swell and watch each other loll. Troops lining the rails and staring out on companion troops knew there was some reason for these things. Never before had they stopped since leaving Albany. Rumours passed and became charged with question; and upon that came the inevitable *badinage*. The old legend of the rat in some high-press cylinder trotted its length and was discarded; then some one announced there was a prayer-meeting on the leading cruiser and the padre desired quiet. It was Sunday afternoon and very hot, that they all knew, but this legend passed the way of others. Again suggestion fell from one who had experienced the Red Sea in July. He gave it as his opinion that the ships were halted to let the breeze blow through them. Some one was down with heat-apoplexy. He asserted, in evidence

of this, a certain passage when coming down the Red Sea a whole gang were down with it, and showed how the ship was turned about so that the breeze might go through her and give life to the still heat of the cabins.

So it went the rounds and in due course was pulverised. It was Sunday, anyway, and the Sunday theory held. On the troop deck countless variants of the officers' talk passed for gospel. Dinner had been one large question; supper was worse. Then came night, and it was seen that the ships no longer carried sidelights, that the masthead light no longer burned, and that the convoy had fallen out of line, and was behaving, as the sailors said, like a blitherin' menagerie.

Then again the engines moved; the columns got into shape and proceeded slowly as before. Routine came in as though nothing had occurred to halt it; bugles gave orders, watches were kept, and the solemn stillness of a tropic night fell on their march towards England.

Stars overhead, stars lambent in seas which had no swing, a star on next ahead, a star set on the stern of each . . . and stars in the hearts of all those who slept as they moved to aid the Motherland.

So the night passed.

There were those who heard gunfire in the morning watch and those who snapped derision. It was seen that the horses were fidgety, and there were those who knew why. Sailors and officers were prodded with questions which they answered in the time-honoured fashion.

"It was the surf on the Cocos away out in the west," said one, "hence the half-speed." "The Jap had run out of oil," another announced; "*Sydney's*

callin' at the islands for a supply." Then one wizard proclaimed that he had it from "signals" that a message had come from Cocos reporting a tidal wave that had swept the wireless station to Hades. This he interpreted as the direct interposition of Providence in the Kaiser's favour.

That made Australia smile. Cornstalk and New Chum, Galahad and *Desdichado*, without exception, decided the Kaiser "couldn't get within coo-ee of his own old god, let alone a white man's."

So the morning opened on argument, the horses were led to it, decks washed, squeegeed, left to steam and get dry, while the ethics of a national fetish were drawn through the mesh. Australia would have none of it. New Zealanders in an adjoining ship sent a message laughing it to scorn. Even the horses jibbed at the notion, and at noon looked for their feed in distinct repudiation.

And there were those in closer touch with events, men in far-off Singapore who heard, in the midst of a morning talk with the wireless station these ships approached, a sudden check, a cry for help and then silence. The message came in a swift rush:

"*Emden* at Cocos landing armed party"—nothing else.

To the operators at Singapore it seemed probable that the landing party had arrived and taken possession of the instruments. They sought verification of this, but no response came through. Then they called up H.M.S. *Minotaur*, nearly a thousand miles distant, and gave in cypher the report they had received, heard her relay it to *Sydney*, ploughing her furrow beside the convoy, and turned their attention again to Cocos.

These islands, now called upon to play their part in the destruction of the *Emden*, were discovered in

1609 by Captain Keeling, of the East India Company's service. From that time until 1823 little was known of them until a certain Alexander Hare established himself on the south-east island with a party of Malays, which included a seraglio of Malay women, of whom, apparently, he was lord. In 1826 Captain Ross, of the *Borneo*, visited the place and the Malays put themselves under his protection; Hare left and Ross took his place.

Admiral Fitzroy seems to have been the next visitor. He arrived in 1836 and found Ross living peaceably with the natives, "who collected cocoanuts for oil and oil from landerabs." Again ten years passed, when Sir E. Belcher came upon the place and found Ross still there, but "living in a miserable hovel, the Malay village being much more inviting."

They are islands, Admiral Fitzroy tells us, "where crabs eat cocoanuts, fish eat coral, dogs catch fish, men ride on turtles, and shells are dangerous mantraps. If anything more were necessary to excuse the voyager being treated like the old woman's son who talked to her about flying-fish, it must yet be said that the greater part of the sea-fowl roost on branches, and that rats make their nests at the top of high palm trees." *

This is the early history of the Cocos or Keeling Islands, which brought, by the perspicacity of a wireless operator, the *Emden* to her last fight: little islets in the midst of the Indian Ocean smaller than the kindred group known as Chagos Archipelago farther to the west—coral reefs which have grown until it became possible for birds to find a lodgment; then through long ages have risen slowly, produced grasses, which have rotted

* Findlay, "Indian Ocean Directory."

and produced even more grasses, always ascending in the scale, capturing drift-weed from the sea, seeds from which scrub has appeared, and finally, when discovered, were green to the edge, beautiful with palm groves, and already possible as a harbour for those who sought hegemony in a new sphere.

How soon or how late, in the march of events which made wireless stations a necessity, the north island was fitted with its tall mast is unimportant. Sufficient that it was equipped and able to send out that message; sufficient that Singapore, another eerie far off on the rim of the world, was able to take it in, decode it, and send it on to those who were near.

Probably the most lonely place in the world is that small islet in the Indian Ocean. It is just a semi-circle of vegetation crowned by palms standing perhaps twenty feet above the sea level: sea within its central horse-shoe lagoon, sea all round it, rolling to blot it out, to hide it as other islands have been hidden. It is the only speck of land between Christmas Island and Amsterdam which lies on the edge of the rolling forties; but it stands to face the swell so that navigators may correct their chronometers as they pass.

Singapore was as much puzzled by the silence as the troops by that Sunday halt. It sought to re-establish communication, but it was nine o'clock in the evening of the fight before it became possible, by using a discarded system, to get in touch once more. Again it brimmed with pride when that whisper came through, listened, and took in the message for which the world waited.

"Been unable to communicate," it said naïvely. "Everything smashed. *Emden* engaged by British cruiser. Result unknown. But the landing party

have commandeered our schooner *Ayesha*. Report us all well . . .”

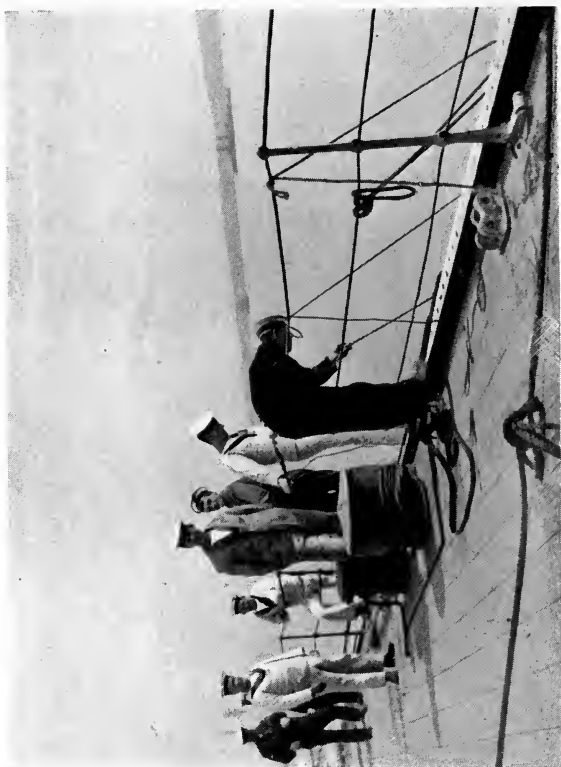
Everything smashed ! Report us all well !

It was as though a cyclone had passed over the island and those who lay hidden bobbed up now it was past. Later came other details which said in effect that the schooner was a rotten old tub, leaky as a sieve, and that her pumps were out of order ; whereat again there were chuckles. But of the *Emden* no further news came yet.

Those who had learned so much and who knew the *Sydney* were in no sort of doubt as to the result, and this was presently confirmed by *Minotaur*, who had relayed the first message sent out from Singapore. *Sydney*, said this authority, was engaged in a game of long bowls. The *Emden* was cornered, but fighting gamely. *Sydney* had bad luck at the start. One of the first shells she received put her range-finder out of action, so it took some time to get on her target. Later the same authority said the raider was up a tree—done in ; that her captain had run her ashore and she was on fire fore and aft. The *Sydney*, it appeared, was scarcely touched.

All this had occurred within earshot of the convoy, yet nothing had been heard of it. Men speculated on the *Sydney's* absence and deduced the fact that she seemed keen set when she started. Some questions were asked of the Jap, but she declined to be drawn. Men guessed the Kaiser was at the bottom of it, or his old god or both. Von Spee they knew was safe. There remained only the *Emden* and *Königsberg* . . . then in the half light of another day came the news—*Emden* had been knocked out by the *Sydney*.

How the world cheered that ! The air stirred at



TENDING THE STAGES.



MORE PAINT !

the sound. "*Sydney* had done it . . . Coo-ee ! Off her own bat . . . Coo-ee ! Alone, without aid of Imperial This or Imperial That. She had plugged her, driven her ashore, made a bonfire of her, and now was busy mopping up the mess. Coo-ee ! Coo-ee !"

No wonder the Jap, over there, sulked. Stop ! Who said she sulked ? No one. The flags which all men can read gave the lie to that as Jap's message was spelled out. "Hail, Australia !" "That's the talk ! Hail !—Victorian hail ! The kind that pierces corrugated iron roofs Dandenong way. . . . *Sydney's* first smack ! Coo-ee !"

Cheers passed down the line as ship after ship got in touch. Nothing now between Cocos and the Old Country but the time occupied by their passage. All plain sailing. Colombo, Aden, Suez, Port Said, Gib. . . . London. So they figured it, chaffing, cognisant of the removal of peril. Men naturally taciturn, men from the back blocks, from the tracts of Never-Never land joined shyly in the general jubilation . . . the rest babbled. Were they not boys ; and was not this the beginning of the Great Adventure for each soul of them all ?

Queensland gripped hands with New South Wales over the monosyllable "Shake." West Australia, Victoria, New Zealand, South Australia, Tasmania, all proffered the hand or the boot, said "Shake" or "Put it there" in the approved style. New South Wales had its fill of shaking. It pictured George Street in the throes of recognition, saw the mayor come out, to announce, from the portico of Sydney Town Hall, those stirring phrases of which he was master ; saw the effect ; pictured the bars, the Domain, when night fell.

Then one morning when the Cocos were astern the troops were told that the *Sydney* would be passing

up the columns on her way to Colombo with prisoners and a whole batch of wounded from the *Emden* . . . that there was to be no cheering, no exultation over a fallen foe—a hard saying which took much cogitation from men honestly proud of their country's fame. They were unhappy over this order. There were those who said it would not be obeyed. They had no quarrel with the *Emden's* crew nor with von Müller, her captain, who seemed to be a bit of a sport . . . but with Germany and the War-Lord they had some quarrel.

The talk ran chiefly on what Fritz would do in similar circumstances, and those who knew of Coronel said definitely the wounded and prisoners would have been left to drown or to the sharks. But you cannot depress men who refuse to be depressed. They waylaid messengers to and from the wireless room and pumped without effect.

The sailor chaps, they decided, seemed to be top dog. Chaff moved on wings between khaki and blue serge. "Did the bloomin' operator know when the bloomin' *Sydney* was coming along?"—that was the gist of khaki's question; and the reply fell in a similar key: "The blinkin' operator did know when the slaverin' *Sydney* was coming, but he wouldn't bloomin' well sell it to blinkin' Cornstalks . . ."

Then Cornstalks got home. "It took the *Sydney* to knock the bloomin' *Emden* out anyway. . . . Australia, sonny, not one of your Imperial Refrigerators, but a blinkin' Cornstalk."

"Yah!" commented blue serge, moving for the bridge ladder, "W'ere would the *Sydney* 'av been if our Fleet hadn't 'eld the ring for 'er? Tell me that an' I'm done."

He sprang up the ladder triumphant, a message

in his wallet which said definitely when the *Sydney* would pass. Kkaki moved away grinning to rejoin his pals.

"Got it this time," he said. "Saw it written all over his face. I'd like to drink his health in somethin' long."

"Smoke on the port quarter!" roared a voice from the top of a stall. "My shout!"—the man waved his hand. "If it's her I win."

A crowd surged upon him accepting this: "If it is, you do."

In half an hour there was no doubt about it. In an hour the man climbed down to collect his sweep, the *Sydney* drawing rapidly near.

They scanned her as she came up between the starboard and centre lines of troopships, and a cheer broke out on more than one densely packed vessel, in spite of orders. They saw that she had been mauled—the marks of battle on her sides and top hamper. She was less trim than when she had steamed beside them away there where now was a gap. Her decks were crowded too. Aft there under the awning was a hospital which occupied the whole quarter deck, and here wounded Germans peered from cots and mattresses at the trim procession they were to have stopped, and the hum of comment swelled again into a roar, died down, swelled and died.

She passed so swiftly up the line of ships that in a moment, it seemed, she was gone—the hour they had prayed for past. She looked so strong in spite of her scratches, so proud, in spite of her tawny upper works, that the troops who watched, thrilled because of her wounds. *Sydney! Sydney!* The round world for *Sydney!* . . . under their breath the phrases leaped. *Sydney! Farewell! Good old Sydney! Wait—by God!—till we can*

get alongside and talk. . . . Wait ! Oh sons of the Southern Cross ! . . . Cheer-o ! Sons of the premier State ! . . . Cheer-o ! Cheer-o !

So she passed, foam about her stem, foam trailing away out there whence she came, passed, and the convoy moved alone.

Then, when the dog watch was come and supper tables cleared, the men climbed on deck, sat on spars and rails to smoke and sing, jubilant still because of the result of this first clash. Australia had won. They sang of it as men do who have left all that the world has given them ; each that he might swell the train of those who fought for an ideal. They sang in the minor cadence of those who have moved in the back blocks, who have humped their swag in Never-Never land, and stood to hold up with a whip a charging mob of cattle ; men who have had the plains for amphitheatre, the beasts and birds for audience.

Then one who played a banjo climbed high upon the fo'c'sle ladder and, sitting beneath the awning, struck two chords and looked around.

"Sez you," he announced, it seemed in diffidence, "by Henry Lawson."

And, when the shouts died down, sang :

"When you're camping on the mulga, and the rain is
falling slow,
While you nurse your rheumatism 'neath a patch of
calico ;
Short of tucker or tobacco, short of sugar or of tea ;
And the scrubs are dark and dismal, and the plains are
like a sea ;
Don't give up and be down-hearted—to the soul of man
be true,
Grin ! if you've got a mate to grin for, laugh and jest
and don't look blue ;
For it can't go on forever, and—' I'll rise some day,'
says you.

“Bother not about to-morrow, for sufficient to the day
Is the evil (rather more so). Put your trust in God
and pray;
Study well the ant, thou sluggard.” Blessed are the
meek and low.
Ponder calmly on the lilies—how they idle, how they
grow.
A man’s a man! Obey your masters! Do not blame
the proud and fat;
For the poor are always with them, and they cannot
alter that;
Lay your treasures up in Heaven—cling to life and see
it through,
For it cannot last forever—‘I will die some day,’ says
you.”

Minor chords followed, and upon them the clang
of the ship’s bell striking the hour.

“Cling to life and see it through,” sang the men
in chorus. “For it cannot last forever—‘I will die
some day,’ says you . . .”

And as the stanza ended the blare of a bugle rang
out, ordering all to prepare for it by sleep.

The starlit tropic night lay over a pulsing armada
with a touch which might have been a caress.

Again in this region of calm seas came garish day,
white-hot as from a furnace mouth. Far astern were
the Cocos Islands, where operators unearched buried
instruments and set in order the wrecked plant.
Farther still, sidelong upon a reef at North Keeling,
the battered *Emden* lay amidst the splutter and
heave of the swell. It crept down upon her, slobber-
ing from the south-east to discover the extent of
her hurts and found her still, wedged upon the coral.
It climbed her side and entered jagged holes torn
in her frame and poured in with the resonant note
of water falling in a tank. It gushed upon her decks,
washing away relics of the fight, pushing amidst

beams and broken machinery to reach her heart, and, having attained it, found it still.

In myriad twistings and boiling eddies it came up to lick at this monster which once had ridden roughshod its waters, bruised its life, and by the fire of its guns caused hideous death in the depths of the sea. Now the sea feared her no longer; the molluscs and shell-fish clambered about her secret chambers and rust was beginning its slow method of decay. Nothing there but strange bodies, blue-grey in the dim light, upon which shell-fish clustered and sharks made fierce attack, all oscillating and waving like fronds on the bottom of the sea. Nothing that thrilled or showed fight—all placid, still as the wrecked guns and shields and pierced funnels which lay farther off. Man, the death-dealer, conquered by man and left to the fishes that they also might challenge and die. Man, the omnipotent, trampler upon things of less power, dead that fish might live and continue to breed.

Then, as the armada moved up the slope from under-world seas, rejoicing in freedom from attack, other whisperings filled the air. At first these came tentatively, then by slow processes arrived at assertion; but they were premature, born of a desire to sail freely, to race, if need be, for the Mother Country which awaited them. Far over in the south-west another raider lurked—one which had caused vast sweepings and concentration on the part of the Imperial Navy. Australia had made light of it from the outset. New Zealand had no doubt in her mind. What was her name no one quite knew; but she would be knocked out somewhere, somewhen, sure as eggs are eggs and the moon is not a green cheese. There was some one looking after her,

whoever she was. She had done mighty little in spite of her freedom. The *Emden* had gone about her business in a methodical fashion and had cost us a million or so ; but this *Königsberg*, if that was her name, seemed to have spent her life crawling from one hole to another. True she had come upon the poor old *Pegasus* lying cleaning her boilers in Zanzibar harbour and knocked her to smithereens. But that was not fighting—despite the fact that the *Pegasus* died fighting.

New Zealand recalled the mode in an earlier generation. The Imperial troops were busy, as usual, finding a new paradise for the surplus British population, and was “up against” a pretty bad streak of Maori offensive. Transport in those days was even more difficult than it is now, and shells took a lot of carrying. So in the thick of an engagement the Maori general noticed that the British artillery was quiet and discovered it was short of ammunition. So they sent messengers under a flag of truce to propose an armistice until the British were ready to go on fighting.

But that happened before the Blonde-Beast had come to his own and had begun to dream of *Welt-politik*. Now he would spray death, if it were possible, with a hose, and preferred to catch his enemies unarmed when he could.

So the *Königsberg* and her doings were discounted in the transports ; but when later it was announced that the Imperial Navy had caught her snuggled up among the palms of the Rufigi River, and blocked her in with sunken colliers while it sent home and ordered special ships—ships of small draught called monitors—Australia and New Zealand sang hymns to the Old Country.

The Imperial Navy, as they always term our

British fleets, could not reach the *Königsberg* with the ships on station. Too much draught, it appeared. Good ! So they blocked her exit and sent home to build something that could ! That showed the breed. It showed something more. It proved to the world and his aunt that the Imperial Navy could do most things, and those things it could not do it would tackle if ordered.

They sang on that theme in the dog watches as they pushed over silent seas heading for Colombo. They sang as men do who are free from care, whose hearts are sound, who have faith in the Cherub theory, but would on no account pass under a ladder in Collins Street if there remained a way round.

The seas were free. That was the whole point of their jubilation. The Imperial Navy had given its word that the convoy should be unmolested, and already, before half the trip was accomplished, the seas were swept for its passage. Literally that was so . . . for a vessel jammed in the delta of a river, outside which prowled a very efficient guard, can scarcely be termed dangerous.

Von Spee, it is true, was still at large ; but he was somewhere on the other side of the world with the Imperial Navy smarting to get even with him. The troops gave very little consideration to von Spee now both the *Emden* and *Königsberg* were accounted for ; but they remembered those who had cheered as they passed through Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide and prayed the news might reach them.

So they passed from under the Southern Cross and found new constellations burning over them : stars which the Greeks had named ; stars as brilliant as any of those they had known.

Instead of α and β Centauri pointing eternally to

the Cross there appeared in days to come pointers which wheeled for ever about *Polaris*. It was a long time before they discovered *Polaris*, and when they did they laughed him to scorn, so small was he to have earned so great a name ; so insignificant to mark the pivot on which the great world turned.

Colombo saw them halted a while on their march, the *Sydney* once more their companion. Aden twinkled a welcome as they crept past the Asses' ears, sent out coal to greet them, little niggers who dived from dug-out canoes, and heat as from the pit. They remembered as they lay in the bay that some one had pointed out a headland with a flowing Arabic name which meant "The Cape of the Winds' Death" * ; and now they recognised its truth. For no wind stirred and the sun threw rays which pierced all awnings, took what air there was, and flung it down for them to sample.

Then again the procession formed up and they passed into the Red Sea, which they found damp in its southern half and cool in its northern ; stared at Jebel Musa, and decided it was uninviting in comparison with the coast line about Zafarana on the other side. There they could see the desert and ranges of low hills which glowed pink at sunrise and threw into vivid contrast the blues and greens of the Gulf of Suez.

They crowed when at length they dropped anchor in the bay ; for here they heard for the first time of the Battle of Falkland Islands, which was fought and won while yet Suez and the Canal upon which they were soon to dig was far on the horizon.

So, forty thousand Australian and New Zealand troops came from down under, resting on an arm of

* Ras Aluleh.

the Imperial Navy. They were of the first who trusted to it; but not the last. It was, indeed, but the beginning of that vast movement of men which has been carried out by the combined naval and merchant fleets of Great Britain—an organisation which to the end of 1917, as Lord Jellicoe tells us, was responsible for the transport of fourteen million men at a cost of less than three thousand lives.*

When it is recognised that immense numbers of these troops are convoyed through the Mediterranean, which is the happy hunting-ground of submarines, and that every month of the war adds to the number and proficiency of these under-sea craft, it must be conceded that the Navy has kept its word.

* 2,700.

CHAPTER XI

JUTLAND AND AFTER

*Trailing Skirts.—The Wet Triangle.—The Fight.—
Clishmaclaver.*

“TO THE PERPETUAL DISGRACE OF PUBLIC JUSTICE,
THE HONOURABLE JOHN BYNG FELL A MARTYR TO
POLITICAL PERSECUTION, MARCH 14, 1757;
WHEN BRAVERY AND LOYALTY WERE INSUFFICIENT
SECURITIES
FOR THE LIFE AND HONOUR OF
A NAVAL OFFICER.”

(Inscription on Admiral Byng's tomb, Southill, Beds.)

IT is very doubtful whether many of us know anything of Admiral Byng beyond the dates as recorded in history.

There certain facts are found stated in terms of the least common measure :

1756. Minorca taken by the French.

1757. Admiral Byng shot for cowardice.

One can see little in these announcements to stir the imagination of youth. The wonder is that Admiral Byng's demise crept into the tabulation of events with which we were bored.

But in later years the incidents, seen through the eye of history, take something from the stigma thrown on a brave man's memory.

“In 1756,” it states, “Admiral Byng was appointed to command the fleet sent to relieve Minorca, at that time threatened by the French. The British Government had received ample notice of the preparations made by

the French King, but utterly neglected the warning, and at length hastily despatched ten ships, so badly equipped that they had to put into Gibraltar to obtain a supply of provisions and to refit. There Byng learned that the French had already landed 19,000 men in Minorca, supported by a powerful fleet, and that the whole island, except Fort St. Philip, was in their hands. A Council of War was held which decided that it was impossible in these circumstances to relieve the Island. Byng, however, made an attempt to open up communications with the Fort, but failed. An action followed with the French fleet, which ended in a drawn battle, and Fort St. Philip capitulated.

"A furious clamour immediately arose in England; and the Ministry decided to sacrifice Byng, in the hope of averting public attention from their own imbecility and gross negligence. He was accordingly superseded and sent home under arrest. The Government journals employed the vilest arts for the purpose of inflaming the minds of the populace against the unhappy Admiral, and inducing them to clamour for his blood. He was tried by court-martial, 28 December, 1756, and found guilty of not having done his utmost to destroy the French fleet and sentenced to be shot, but unanimously recommended to mercy on the ground that he had failed solely from an error in judgement.

"Strong representations were made in his favour from various quarters, and even, at the instigation of Voltaire, from the French general, Marshall Richelieu; but without avail. The iniquitous sentence was carried into effect at Portsmouth on the 17th of March, 1757.

"He met his fate with the courage of a hero and the resignation of a Christian."*

From this, it appears, the hounds were in full cry; that "popular clamour" was sufficient, and was supreme even then. The sacred flame of a people who knew nothing but what they were told of the circumstances was all powerful. King Demos, stirred by politicians, had no doubt at all on the matter;

* James Taylor, D.D., "Universal Biography" Vol. I.

therefore Admiral Byng was shot for not compassing the impossible.

Democracy is an instrument of many voices, and all of them clamant. The Latins tell us that the voice of the people is the voice of God ; but it may be they were thinking of the Delphic oracle. In these years of war and trial it sometimes appears that freedom of speech and the liberty of the Press, which run comfortably together in harness, are well on the way to become intolerable.

Not very long ago it was calmly proposed that democracy should depose its King, and with him the whole paraphernalia of royalty. A great paper printed the letter, and in another column printed a leader telling the writer he was a clever man, yet nevertheless he was a fool. The English people, it decided, loved royalty.

At that moment the war was not going very well for us here in the west. Russia was doddering into the hands of those who have slain her. The Czar and his family had been deposed, and amidst general trumpeting we had approved of the action of democracy.

Voltaire said : " If there were no God it would be necessary to invent Him." And so we, who are of the English, say : " If there were no King it would be necessary to invent him." Except among a certain section of the community, the British people are loyal to their King and will fight for him whenever it pleases the wreckers to stand by their guns. As a matter of fact the nation, so far as the unclamant section is concerned, is quietly preparing for certain events which seem to be in the way of decision. As in the old sullen days of 1910—14, when, stirred by the " hen roost " doctrine, the country was within

an ace of civil war, so now ; but the cause will not be Ireland. It will be the cause of England, Scotland, and Wales, who have faced the burdens of war without flinching and are ready, if need be, to fight yet again for ideals.

The essence of trailing your skirt through the Wet Triangle is that you do it in such fashion as to persuade your enemy to tread on it. You pose as an unfortunate section of the Fleet entirely without support, sent out no one knows why, to pry into enemy secrets . . . but the main thesis is that you must appear, if the enemy comes out, to be caught napping. You must even simulate, by turning tail, that you will run away.

It is a dreary business, and usually unproductive. The North Sea is dreary at any time ; but never so wholly and monstrosly dreary as now, when, as you trail, the crews are at gun stations, the navigators strung by the exigencies of mine-fields, and the whole business looms as endless.

As a rule, even before Jutland, you saw nothing but the grey sea, the grey clouds, the gulls ; and these you could have seen at any time more comfortably from your base. You knew that in all probability the Germans were quite alive to your procession, of the skirt you trailed, of the support which lay farther off waiting to hear a rip—that the Germans, being at all events as wily as we are, would refuse to see the skirt.

If he thought he could pounce out, rip it and get back unmauled, he would do it with all that airy grace and *Kultur* of which he is master. He is trained to take advantage of conditions. It is thus he accomplishes those “tip-and-run” affairs which produce such a boiling of words. He comes under

the cover of a black night at full speed, discharges at random a score of shells which may or may not reach British homes, and scuttles back. It is like taking out a steam-roller to crush a cockleshell. It scares the gulls and kills fishes ; its excuse, if there be one, is that it is used subtly to hearten the German people . . . what would you have, seeing we are at war ?

But in this matter of skirt-trailing it is not the skirt that troubles your Germans ; it is the support which he surmises is there to keep it in position. That honestly troubles him, not because he fears to run risks, but because he refuses with a smaller fleet to take great risks. For this reason the skirt-trailers usually draw a blank, often are handicapped by weather which would blacken the character of any sea, and get back to their base in no fit temper to read stupid comment on their " inaction."

The fleets, before Jutland, steamed thousands of miles in the hope of dragging Germany to battle ; they swept the Heligoland base, threaded channels, and strove by every artifice known to sailors to lure the fleet still called the German High Sea Fleet into the arena to face the music. And Germany stood in the market-place complacently listening to orators who told them the British had been pushed off the seas. . . . One supposes it is what they desire to believe. The French would call a statement of that kind *camouflage*, but until quite recently the British spoke of it as a lie.

Now on May the 31st, 1916, Sir David Beatty was trailing the skirt, very much as Nelson used to trail his off Toulon, when he hid his line of battleships and sent in a bunch of frigates to ask Villeneuve if he were ready for a talk. The Wet Triangle was in

a placid mood, Sir John Jellicoe doing his best to be in touch and hidden at the same time, a very difficult problem in modern war. He was to the north of the cruiser squadron led by Sir David Beatty ready with a fleet which would crush the German Navy, if it took the bait, and leave the seas free indeed. In quiet weather seaplanes and Zeppelins can be more active than in rough ; so the distance which separated the two sections of the British Fleet, roughly sixty miles, could be covered at twenty-five knots in an hour and ten minutes, if they steamed to effect a junction.

The afternoon watch was in being, the weather hazy, and Admiral Beatty moving up from the west towards the shoal ground off the north-west coast of Denmark known as Jutland Bank. His appearance in those waters appeared casual ; but as a matter of fact he was engaged with Admiral Jellicoe in carrying out a combined sweep of the North Sea. It had often happened. Often nothing had come of it, but at 2.30 on this day a message came through from one of Sir David Beatty's scouts reporting the presence of enemy ships to the eastward.

Instantly all suggestion of accident vanished ; the Battle-Cruiser Fleet was set humming at full speed in the direction indicated. At 3.30 those on the leading ships made out a group of five battle-cruisers flying the German flag, steaming to the north. On sighting the British Fleet the Germans turned tail and made for their base ; which is precisely what was to be expected, seeing the great superiority of the British.

It is possible, of course, that the five cruisers were out to trail a skirt for the trailers ; in other words, it may be that the mission of the Germans was to lure the British Battle-Cruiser Fleet into the arms

of von Scheer, who was at that moment moving with his High Sea Fleet on the same course as that from which Sir David Beatty had pushed his cruisers.

To attack in these circumstances was a risk ; but it was just one of those risks that any British admiral would take without hesitation—especially when for months the war at sea had been in the condition of stalemate. Admiral Beatty had no doubt at all what he must do. He turned south when the Germans turned south, and, running on a parallel course, engaged them at long range. He continued to close until the High Sea Fleet was sighted steaming to the support of its Cruiser Squadron.

The Germans had just shown him what they would do in such a situation ; but Admiral Beatty was of sterner quality. He was there to bring the German Fleet to action, to get his teeth into it and cling on until the Commander-in-Chief could come down and form a junction ; and he did so in spite of the known fact that the coming High Sea Fleet was powerful enough to overwhelm him.

If he had turned, as the Germans turned on sighting him, he might have lost touch : the High Sea Fleet, having saved its cruisers, or what was left of them, might have returned to its base. The junction with the Commander-in-Chief at which the admiral was aiming would have taken place in the air. The Germans would have escaped. Yet every minute he continued on this southern course Admiral Beatty was increasing the distance between himself and Sir John Jellicoe. But—and this is the crux of the whole business—he was mauling Germans, getting his teeth into the flank of an enemy so elusive that it appeared he would never stand.

A leader who knows what he wants, and has the courage to carry it through when the opportunity

occurs, is a leader of the type we love in this country, and it may be that Sir David Beatty knows it. But the leader who can calmly steam in the face of annihilation because he conceives it to be his duty, is one before whom the British people may uncover without shame.

The thunder of guns, the crash of bursting shells, the smoke from funnels and from screens ; the deadly rush of destroyers and submarines ; the reek and shock of giants speaking with 13-inch and 15-inch guns is so tremendous that one is amazed that men can encounter it and remain sane. There are no dug-outs on the decks of a battleship—the men in the turrets are screened, it is true ; but those who direct events are on the bridge and in the control, with nothing between them and the shells but mattresses slung to the rails to keep off splinters.

So the ships of Admiral Beatty's squadrons headed "into the jaws of death, into the mouth of hell," to do their duty for England. Then came a moment when to proceed farther meant annihilation without compensating losses to the enemy, and the order went out to turn sixteen points. The limit of safety had been passed ; the ships would now return, drawing, if Joss were kind, the Germans in their train. The cruisers which had been heading south now turned also, and with the High Sea Fleet concentrated their fire upon our ships.

One imagines it was then the chief losses occurred, but I have no means of verifying this. But you may take it that when a ship is turning on her helm she presents a larger target to the gunners ; she is pivoting, in a sense, moving in a certain direction through the arc of a circle, and the moment is dangerous. It was essential, too, that it was done at once, for every minute decreased the distance

between the opposing fleets, increased the visibility and the chance of direct hits.

So the Battle-Cruiser Fleet came round and headed in such a direction as would permit the Commander-in-Chief to effect a junction. It steered to the northward, trailing the skirt once again, and this time with the whole German Fleet yapping and thundering at its heels.

Only in this fashion, it had been decided, was it possible to compel the Germans to stand and fight. If you corner a rat, or a cockroach, the odds are either will fight. If you get between a man and his home, no doubt he will fight to the last. . . . It was the only sure way of getting the thing done, unless we are to sit tight and win without fighting—if that be possible.

So the two British Fleets pounded to join forces, Admiral Beatty heading north, Admiral Jellicoe moving at full speed to meet him. Of course they were in touch by signal, the mysterious folk known to the lower deck as "the angels" * busy with codes. Each admiral knew exactly what the other was doing; engine-room staffs were straining every nerve to beat their own records. You can picture these giants as alive, hissing through seas to catch the slippery Teuton, imagine the strain, the tense waiting for minutes to pass, and the anxious brains of those in command noting the fleeting moments, the declining light.

Meanwhile the Germans pounded north in chase, certain, apparently, that no Grand Fleet was on the horizon.

One of the main difficulties in this war is that the opposing fleets are concentrated in a puddle, and that the Germans, who have no wish to take

* Wireless operators.

great risks, always fight, patrol, or manœuvre close to their base. It was easy so to slip home when, as in this instance, it became necessary. Horn Reef, to the north of which this battle was fought, is but eighty-eight miles from Heligoland. The Firth of Forth, the nearest British base, is about three hundred and seventy miles west of Horn Reef. It can be seen from this that the German claim to have driven us off the seas is *camouflage* of a very pronounced order. Plain men would term it a lie, but the Germans are supermen, which accounts for some things we have seen and heard.

At twenty-five knots the German Fleet could be within shelter of their mine-fields in three hours or less—a calculation which must depend on their extent. At the same speed it would take the British Fleet fifteen hours to reach home—what other proof is necessary to point the situation must be left to cultured Germany?

It must be conceded that it is hard on men who have succeeded by blood and stress in drawing their enemy out of his hole to recognise the approach of forces over which no admiral has any control, that may dish him at the last moment. Yet that was even now on the way to hamper the movements of the Grand Fleet. It is harder still to know that, because the enemy escaped annihilation, there should arise that clamour among people who know, or knew then, nothing of the conditions, which ended in the old days in the martyrdom of Admiral Byng.

Macaulay tells us that “no man is so merciless as he who, under a strong self-delusion, confounds his antipathies with his duties.” It is possible this is the case with those critics who, seated comfortably at home, have no phrase harsh enough for those by whose gallantry alone they are able to smoke and talk.

What happened exactly at this stage of the Battle of Jutland will, I suppose, be debated through the coming years with all the virulence we usually spare for those who win for us a splendid security. But here, in justice to those who fought, it may be reiterated that when the junction was effected between the two sections of the Grand Fleet, and Admiral Jellicoe by his masterly handling had placed himself across the line of German retreat, the afternoon was gone and the evening come—a North Sea evening, hazy in lifting and falling patches, the sun screened, smoke and the aftermath of shell fire aiding it.

It was six o'clock before Admiral Hood, who had been dispatched by the Commander-in-Chief with the third Battle-Cruiser Squadron, arrived and magnificently placed his ships in line ahead of the hard-pressed Battle-Cruiser Fleet under Admiral Beatty. And the visibility was poor sometimes, and sometimes fair.

In spite of this junction the German Fleet, still with an immense advantage in numbers and guns, continued to press to the north, but at 6.15 Admiral Scheer sighted the approaching Grand Fleet, and at once turned to the east to avoid the trap which had been prepared. The action continued. Only the direction was changed. The nutcrackers were closing . . . but so, too, was the day.

At eight o'clock the Grand Fleet was across the threshold leading to the German base, and Admiral Scheer was preparing, with Hipper, to stave off the coming attack. Every move of the German hereafter was in the direction of home, of saving his fleet. To keep the British Fleet from closing in he sent out a cloud of destroyers and light cruisers—vessels which added to the density which was growing by smoke screens, and to the dangers, in that half-light,

of torpedo attacks. These tactics, combined with the lack of visibility, undoubtedly saved the German High Sea Fleet. The attack was carried out with a courage and dash which make one wish that, in other fields, the German sailor had aimed, not only to beat us, but to win our respect.

So the battle roared and thundered. Specks on the horizon belched flame at which opponent specks aimed. At this time there should still have been two hours of daylight; but with characteristic malignity the mist patches grew till the North Sea and its currents dominated the situation. And under cover of it came the German screen of cruisers and destroyers, the light cavalry of the sea, with torpedoes and gunfire to hold back the British line. To greet them and render their efforts nugatory the British destroyers moved out.

At nine o'clock the official report of the action states that visibility was bad, and we may take it that, when men had accomplished what those of the Grand Fleet had accomplished, it was bad indeed. Sufficient to rob them of that overwhelming victory which had almost been within their grasp. Sufficient to make those who had striven and fought for it despair. A question of an hour or two. A question of being able to see. At a moment when all those with whom I have discussed this action are unanimous in saying that the German gunnery had gone to pieces. Time and daylight—those are the elements which robbed the Grand Fleet of perhaps the greatest victory the world has seen.

Then came night. Giants in armour groping in the dark. Light cruisers and destroyers out on their own, flitting hither and thither in the dark. Fighting in spite of their all-day vigil, seeking out enemy destroyers, cruisers, battleships if the gods so willed;

fighting mists and screens of smoke ; dazzled by a glare one minute, blind the next ; fighting the night through without lights ; flashing their little signals of identification ; avoiding collision, wreckage ; guns busy, mouldies slithering, fighting with all the flair and deathless instinct of the British sailor.

Drakes, Collingwoods, St. Vincents ; Shotley, Portsmouth, Chatham, Devonport—all were there, all were in it. Busy with red flame in the business of annihilation. Busy with death and wounds flung haphazard among them. Busy aiding each other, towing the cripples, fighting the flames, mending machinery . . . fighting for God and England, that we who do not fight and often question the ethics even of defence, may live and continue to till our cabbage patch.

II.

On the morning of the 1st of June, it is stated in Admiral Jellicoe's report, "the British Fleet remained in the proximity of the battlefield . . . the enemy, however, made no sign, and I was reluctantly compelled to the conclusion that the High Sea Fleet had returned into port."

Some folk called this Kismet, others Joss, and the papers seemed inclined to pat the Navy's scarred back. But the Navy set its teeth, questioning what mountains remained to be climbed.

Perhaps a week later and the hounds were in full cry.

To trouble people honestly anxious to follow the movements of our sons a report appeared which gave the impression of defeat, when all the world knew we had won.

That is a mistake of the kind which is very

difficult to explain—yet explanation appeared, and, with it, clishmaclaver . . . anything you choose to term it.

So much has been written on the subject that it seems unnecessary to enter here more fully into that statement. Talk is illusive. So is proof. It is bedded on truth with a spring-mattress of lies. Where it comes from no one appears to know ; but it is circumstantial. It is very sure of itself—very sure of its facts, as it terms them. Charge and counter-charge appear in the drapings of knighthood and are discovered to be drabs.

The attack on men, unable by the rules of their Service to reply, warms and invigorates those who attack. Badinage, innuendo, heckling, follow in a House which should have learned wisdom. Newspapers fan the flame. Again and again during this war the phase has presented itself. One is at once puzzled by it and unable to assign a cause. We seem to be on edge ; yet, when we meet and talk, nothing is farther from the truth. We are calm, even jocular, in the midst of the ghastliest war the world has known. Murder stalks us as we walk the street, as we do our work, as we sleep. Murder tracks our shipping. We learn of torturings more cruel than those devised by the Inquisition ; of the use of poison-gas which produces effects so far-reaching and terrible that those who understand are aghast at the consequences. We know of the slaughter of men daily in thousands ; we know of our burden of debt, of our difficulties with regard to food, and we are inclined, generally, to make the best of it, even to joke. . . . But if a “tip-and-run” raid gets home on the coast, fires shells for half a dozen minutes, and slips back in the teeth of a blizzard, or a fog, or such foul blackness as the raiders may choose, we scream, if not in words, then

in intent : " What is the Navy doing ? " " Is the Navy asleep ? " . . . And only the other day letters appeared, the burden of them the same, but set to a pitch that only a shell can produce : " Is there no one who will avenge us ? "

One is concerned naturally for the agony of those who have been hit nearly ; one can gauge the state of mind of those who see the effect of shell fire or bombs in their homes, and pass with bowed head before the despair which called forth those letters, but has not the Navy given its toll ? It is impossible to pass without comment the paper or journal that prints such cries. Those who produce newspapers are not the kind of people who are afflicted with nerves, or spasms of any sort. What they print they print deliberately, having taken counsel with their own courage. They may think that letters and comment of this kind do good. Perhaps they may have other reasons for printing them ; but in a rather long acquaintance with the world I am not inclined to think the thing is an accident. It all bears on one point. So and So, it has been decided, M.G. Once we wrote these things plainly if we wrote them at all ; but now, it seems, we are content to Morse our aim, without the knowledge of Morse. At all events the clamour continues, until So and So H.G., if one may invent a new hieroglyphic.

The Press is a very potent factor in the nation's life. What would become of us either individually or as a nation if the Press were hamstrung is a question for the nation to decide . . . but when one sees, as one must, unless blind, things like this hawked for folk to buy, " Bomb Berlin to Blazes," and remember that it comes from the quarter, which bid us, in the anxious days of July-August,

1914, fold our hands, in a sentence, equally raucous which said "To Hell with Serbia!" one is inclined to smile; but when great papers stand side by side with clamour and demand of His Majesty's Government that "The public are entitled to know" why So and So is kept in office, and why So and So is not deposed, the matter becomes more serious.

The first damages the cause of national unity by attracting with its headline the ignorant and the curious; the second damages the thinking sector by the inferred slur it throws out. The nation lacks big men, it is said, and, it appears, the nation, aided by the Press, or *vice versa*, if you will, hounds big men out of office if they fail to do anything spectacular to please it.

Where is this to end?

The troubles from which the nation is suffering are due to the fact that it refused to prepare for war. Ministers refused to warn it; some went farther and boldly challenged Lord Roberts when he stood to warn it. In spite of that it is impossible to acquit the country of ignorance. Military service, conscription, what you will of preparation, was anathema in its eyes. The Press to a large extent took a serious view of the situation; but the country was content, smug and very full of the joys of motoring. The cloud on the horizon was not Germany, but Ireland; not Bernhardt and his nostrums, but the Suffragettes and the various consciences. Nothing else mattered. These things would be squared. There was no need to worry over either of them. National sanity would prevail even if the Commons and the Lords played the fool . . . but Germany! My dear man, there is no such thing as Germany in the sense you speak of. Germany is intent as we are on maintaining peace . . . "amateur-strategists," like Lord Roberts,

may say what they will, but you will never persuade the nation to believe that Germany wants war. . . .

It proceeded farther, as we know. And at length war came.

A nation which refused to prepare, which would go to jail and there hunger-strike to obtain freedom rather than accept military service in any form—if we may believe the various doctrinaires—should be willing to take punishment without squealing at the Navy by whose gallantry alone it has breath to squeal.

Europe is not free of the bestial Hun. France and Belgium, Serbia, Roumania, Italy—all have felt the horror of contact with the Blonde-Beast of modern Germany; but England is free, untouched by the world-criminal, and, by the grace of those who steam, trailing skirts up and down the Wet Triangle, likely to remain untouched.

England was unready, Russia recovering from her Japanese adventures, France occupied with her "affaires"—that is why we are at war; why Germany was able to seize the Belgian ports which she now uses to harbour the craft with which alone, at sea, she can strike us. It was because we were unready that the Navy was tied in the early days of this struggle. Invasion was very near then—only the Navy held it back.

Mark the messages that went out from Germany when England declared war, and gauge the German consternation. . . .

"Return immediately to New York. . . . Return to Monte Video, Buenos Ayres, Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso, Callao." "Return to Lisbon, Trieste, Barcelona, Constantinople. . . . Return at once."

And Germany's merchant ships, greyhounds,

cruisers of the merchant service and cargo-boats made haste to obey . . . because the British Fleet was moving from the Solent to take up the positions assigned to it in the North Sea.

It is the only sign of confusion in the whole machine-planned war of Germany, the only signal that the unexpected had happened. Henceforth Germany's merchant fleets would be under lock and key to the countries which interned them. Henceforth, except as pawns in the game, Germany could not use them. They were tied up fast to the quay walls.

And, in a sense, the British Fleet was tied also. It could wait and watch. It could burnish its shield, keep fit, build new types, trail skirts about the shallow waters of the North Sea, but it was, and is, almost impossible to bring the German Fleet to action. The German Fleet, acting on the same principle as the German field force when checked on the Marne, had dug itself in—and, in spite of some heroic talk, it was not possible to dig it out.

In the years which preceded war it had been possible to render war impossible. A little plain speech would have gone far to sober the Junkers and their leaders. It would have helped to sober England. The flourish of Germany's sword was plainly seen from Algeciras onward to Zabern and beyond.* He would be wilfully blind who missed it. It provoked plain speech, if ever brandished truculence can be said to aim at clearing the air; but no answer was forthcoming, and this in spite of the fact that certain treaties were in force.

The question for Germany was whether Great Britain would abide by them, or would she squirm out as she did in '64 and '70? That was the crux

* This was written before the revelations of Prince Lichnowsky which certainly prove it.

for Germany, and Germany saw in our posturings and squabblings very potent reasons why we must squirm out. It could not conceive a country rising above her troubles and drawing the sword in defence of an ideal when obviously what army she had was at loggerheads over the question of Ulster. It could not understand that behind all the rapier play of Ministers and their assailants lay a sense of justice other than that for which they fought. It could not imagine an England, dusty and smothered in verbiage, dropping her briefs, and buckling to her girdle the sword she had forsworn.

Hence the chaos, the one chaos, in Germany's machine-like advance on France—her merchant service lost to her, her colonies lost, her trade at a standstill; the British Fleet throttling her; the Englander she hates, and at whom for years she has sneered, standing in the mud, one against three, one against five as it came to be, standing "sticking it," as men say, while K. of K. and those others built up an Army.

Are these things true? And if they are, is it necessary to continue this strangely un-English campaign?

Is it essential for the nation's existence that speakers and Press alike should for ever be girding at this, that, or the other admiral, general; that leaders of one section or another of what is known as the working man should incessantly demand new versions of what we are fighting for . . . why So and So is in office when everybody knows he is a dunder-head, why the Huns got through last night, and what are we going to do with the fools who let them through?

Is it essential that democracy should always be shrill and provocative of smiles? Is it necessary to

threaten and shout what will happen to morrow or the next day if food is not forthcoming for each sanctified worker in this or that or the other district? Is it wise to belabour in the Press, in the House and on the platform, officers who happen to be in command of sections where raids will certainly come unless we bar the Straits of Dover with booms and mines? Is it quite *gentil*, shall we say, to bespatter the War Office with quite so much abuse ("the soulless and brainless War Office" is a sample), to sneer at the officers who are seen in London, to hold "Red-Tabs" and "Cuthberts" and "uniformed indispensables" up to contempt daily and hourly?

Have any of them hurt those who squeal, or is it democracy's way to "Yah!" when it sees a man trim and in uniform? We complain of the censorship. It seems to me we should complain of licence.

A little while ago it was Lord Kitchener who stood silent to take the burden of jeers. Again a little while, and it was Admiral Bacon and the doddering Dover patrol . . . then it was Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson and Admiral Jellicoe . . . a dozen others.

Why?

And if there be a reason, what method is there in it?

The men in the trenches do not shout and jeer at the "Red-Tabs" whose duty it is to order attack or defence. The men of the Fleet would make it uncomfortable, if I know them, for the man who dared to belittle Lord Jellicoe on the mess deck. The men of the Merchant Service and fishing patrols are not hot gossellers out for scalps; and they, of all those who fight our battles, are the men we might expect to cry out. . . . Have they not fought without guns, made it possible for ships to move on the high

seas, starved and died in open boats that we may continue in comfort ; yet we hear no verbal cudgelings from them.

To come from the calm atmosphere of the Grand Fleet and the various naval centres into this jargon is perplexing. Those who have visited the trenches tell the same story. There is nothing of it anywhere but here.

None from the soldiers, none from the sailors, none from the Merchant Service . . . none from that vast section of the people which is not making money out of the war. . . . Then is it not possible for those who shout to preserve their balance also ?

We are at war. The end of it trails afar off, and in spite of the clamour the soul of a people stands fast. To-morrow, it may be, we shall not be here to watch the ebb and flow of battle. Giant machines wing out to sting us whether we work or play ; whether we face the sun or the stars, smile or weep. There is no place in these islands where to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, enemy craft may not come to rake us into the cinder-heap of our past.

We read, write, sleep, visit theatres, eat, drink, and strive to be merry ; yet over us is ever the stalking-horse of Force preparing fresh slaughterings. For four years we have been at war, and spouters of sedition should be under lock and key ; but they remain with us, free to shout, free to shower benisons on those of like mind. Some talk in the House as though we sat *in camera* and the dome which is overhead kept from our enemies all talk. They snarl and edit gossip even as in those days when we warred with Home Rule, talked glibly of civil war or millenium, and planned how to make the rich poor the poor rich.

Yet to-day, when the nation is at war more certainly than ever in history, when races confront one another with the implements each have forged, the talk goes on; the profiteering, if it be profiteering, goes on, and the untutored grow weary, impatient of their leaders and snarl with their masters.

The difficulties of life stand over these folk. The "missis" is hit, the "kiddies" are hungry. It is the fault of this lord, this general, this admiral, say the particular papers they read. If men of this type are in the swim of it, who shall stand against them? Anarchy could make headway, one whispers; then anarchy has it. Revolution could set things right—then ho! for revolution. The chatterers chatter, the printers print, and the people listen and read. Some of the stuff is mere gossip, some of it innuendo, while elsewhere is what is known as straight talk given with double-leaded headlines. "To hell with this, that or the other!" shouts one swollen tipster pondering a circulation which shall beat all records.

"Strike now!" cries another, subtlety to the fore, "Strike hard—the moment is at hand!" "Democracy wins!" "The People rule!" . . . the invitations to riot trail off into blasphemy—as is seen.

Yet we are at war, working superbly with all the energy and vim of a nation stung to the depths by the handlers of Force. We are at war, yet we stand with the casuists pondering quibbles. All the world rings with our praise; only in our midst are the sounds of obstruction.

War is our atmosphere, our meat and drink, day in, day out. We hear the guns. The earth quakes listening. We see our trains of wounded; we know of the acres of little wooden crosses planted out there in the mud-flats of Flanders; we know of the sailor's leaden toil, the toll he has paid . . . but the nation

stands firm, its teeth bared for war—war till our peace shall be won. War—the bloody arbitrament of Force, without which the nation had died. War—the one word to thrust down the throat of the pedant, the quibbler, the theorist—war, war—nothing but war.

For an ideal it was ours; for an ideal it remains to our hand: for our children; for the safety of “our most gracious Sovereign . . . and his Dominions, and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions.” For the love of our country we are at war. Because of its green fields we are at war; because of its lakelands, its hills and dales, and the forests which inspired us to live for ideals.

Because of the thousands who work and are tired; because of women and girls bent with toil; because of men too old for the field whose hours are spent in service; because of those who construct ships and guns and shells and ammunition . . .; because of the vigil of the North Sea and the splendid spirit of our fleets; because of our soldiers, knee deep in the mire of Flanders; because of the vast sacrifice we have made, and continue to make, it is ours to fight on, to fight as one people; to fight with our leaders so that men may learn that Force is anathema, a thing accursed by God and all that race of men who stand now, shoulder to shoulder, warring for an ideal.

CHAPTER XII

THOSE WHO FIGHT

*The Grand Fleet.—Mist and Shine.—Control.—War
Aims of the Sailors.*

“ The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means ; and My people love to have it so ; and what will ye do in the end thereof ? ”—JEREMIAH v. 31.

THE Grand Fleet was at anchor in a roadstead far in the north ; grey ship beyond grey ship lying still in a curtain of mist. Glimpses of sloped foothills escaped at intervals, crags stood out of the fleeting gauze, and there appeared those dazzling gleams of colour so loved by Peter Graham, with the gulls soaring high on the wing, dipping low, scrambling for food. And from them came the cry we know and love—piercing, insistent. Otherwise silence ringed the roadstead as with a wall.

From the heights by the bridge the ships looked like the toys with which years ago we played and fought small battles on a cardboard sea. They lay so still they might have been the painted ships of our historied past with Drake and Nelson brooding over them. Grey line and silver gauze, trembling here aslant the hills in gleams, retiring there in shadow. Grey shape and silver steam, motionless the one, vibrant the other ; but all blended, silent, only the gulls alert.

Launches, picket-boats, cutters crammed with men

like dots, moved slowly trailing thin tracks, busy with the unending sacrifice of the sea. A little collier, grumpy, and cocked by the nose, drifted out of the farther mist and came down the Firth slashing at the water with a propeller that scorned immersion. She made no sound, gave out no horn note, no hiss of progress, no thud with a screw obviously at grips with the sea, the tide and a thrust block buried in her vitals. Only when she had passed was sound audible; the beat of her blades upon the sea came up then, solemn, like a drum.

A light breeze drove in from the east and with it the mist became dense. The crags retired. No gleams appeared upon the sea or down the farther hillsides. The little ships which were so great, one by one retired from sight; only the mist was left, silvery, damp, peopled by gulls.

Far off was a great city awl with its business, trams whirring, newsboys shouting, caterers busy, the business of printing in full swing . . . profiteers and pacifists, all of them at work. Nearer was a naval base which had sprung into full being at the call of a people unready for war; its tin houses and blocks of offices; its puddled roads quaking to the throb of engines drawing huge trucks, trollies, all the paraphernalia of equipment essential to the life of a fleet. On the one side a long point of land, slippery and uneven, trailed from the clouds, leaning out like a finger pointing to the sea which lay beyond.

The air became more charged with mist. The tide swept up from a vanished horizon, drawing outlines in foam the colour of scum. A dull boom shook the air, a thud, heavy, as of a mine. It came across hills with the echo of a sob, and instantly, it seemed, a destroyer moved through the haze going to the gates of the sea. She made

no signal, sounded no horn, but passed like a wraith by the finger of land and was gone.

In the morning I came from the station in an Admiralty car up the long, winding, switchback road which led to the base. The sun shone now, but the wind, still in the east, rippled up the slope with a touch of winter; yet August reigned and the trees were green to the tips. I asked the officer who had come to meet me what had happened last night just off the port, and he said:

"More bacon and eggs gone to the bottom. Fritz got home his pill and we got home ours."

"A slice of luck," I said, "for us also. I wish one could send that to the papers."

"Can't be done," he decided. "I wish it could . . . but you see if we reported it Fritz would know what boat was operating here and that she was gone. Out would come another. As it is, Fritz has to wait. He waits a long while, and the uncertainty gets on his nerves. He gets scared, and by-and-by when relatives begin to ask questions he tells lies. They tell lots, for we sink 'em in bunches . . . but then, you see, that doesn't count for much, as they build 'em in bunches as well."

I asked what boat had gone down, and he said:

"A Dutchman . . . perhaps fifteen miles off the port. Escort with her too; but on the other side. Doesn't seem to have struck him there was another side. He was just beginning to practise on the crew—*spurlos versunk*, you know—when the escort rounded the bow and scuppered him. Went clean through him. You should go down the dock and see her nose!"

"Crew saved?"

"A couple."

“ And the Dutchman ? ”

“ Except those killed by torpedo all taken off the escort by the destroyer you saw going out.”

“ It was as thick as a hedge,” I said. “ How they can find their way so slick puzzles me.”

“ We have our system,” he laughed. “ It isn’t a bad old gadget ” ; and there he left it as the car turned into a small wired-in space, in the centre of which was one of the low corrugated-iron and timber buildings which are known as tin houses.

A broad verandah, of the stoep order, stood between the small garden and headquarters. A flagstaff, taut and trim, flew the naval ensign at the peak and an admiral’s flag at the masthead. A couple of blue-jackets and a sentry came to attention as we alighted, and my companion led the way acknowledging the salute.

“ We’re dead on time,” he said. “ I shall leave you with Flags, and he will take you to the Commander-in-Chief.”

“ Is this where you work ? ” I asked.

“ And sleep,” he laughed ; “ it’s better than it was. You should have seen us the first year.”

“ And the C.-in-C.—does he live here too ? ”

“ Rather . . . it’s not a bad old shanty when the sun shines. Come in—I’ll introduce you.”

I looked at this optimist. He was quite serious—no camouflage within a mile. One could no more doubt that fresh, young face and keen blue eyes than one could doubt the sea.

He entered a small room, bulkheaded from the passage and a farther room which opened off it. Here I was left with my new guide to shed my overcoat, hat, gloves, cane, and prepare for the ordeal.

You see, although I knew something of the Navy and had been guest on various ships and at various

messes, hitherto during my wanderings I had not visited the Grand Fleet but worked up to it. Wherever I had stayed the question had been put to me, "Have you seen the Grand Fleet yet?" or "Are you going to the Grand Fleet?" And always I had said, "No—but I am on the way there." I had heard, too, the unvarying comment, "Lucky man!" or "By George I envy you!"—so had come to know that even those engaged daily and hourly in this fight looked upon the Grand Fleet as the supreme power, the one thing to see before you die.

I was aware also that, in spite of my passes and credentials, it depended entirely on the Commander-in-Chief, the late Admiral Sir F. T. Hamilton, whether I were permitted the honour of going off, bag and baggage, to some giant of the sea, which perchance had fought at Jutland. So you may be sure my pulses tingled. I was keen, not for an hour or so under strict marching orders, but for days, or weeks, if possible, so that I might grow accustomed to the strange life, of which hitherto, in various corners of the world, I had managed to obtain gleams.

I was chatting with the flag officers present—envying them their chances, if you will; seeing them as cadets at Osborne in the sun-warmed south, and gauging their march to this—knowing well the trial presently would be behind that door.

It came without a hint of warning from the flag-lieutenant. He looked round, said "Ready?" I signalled assent. He opened the door, entered, closed it. In two minutes he returned and I followed him within, heard the door click as he retired.

At the far side of a low, square room was a desk set in an angle of the wall facing windows which ran from side to side. Charts were pinned at hand, doubtless with little ships clinging to those areas

under their control—I could not see. Behind the desk I saw a slight, grey-bearded officer, wearing the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet and a string of ribbons, rising to greet me. He came forward with hand outstretched, met me midway, took my hand, and walked with me slowly to the window. Here he halted and leaned back against the drawing-desk which ran beneath the window, speaking quietly of Sir Douglas Brownrigg, the letter he had sent, and searching me with so keen a look that my wits were easily nowhere.

The full light of a brilliant day was upon me : his own face in shadow. I wished to see what his eyes said, but they said nothing. He was very quiet, yet he held me prisoned.

I don't know that I can recall any searching more kindly or thorough in my days, though while on my wanderings I have had to face many. He said without words : "Here is a stranger, with credentials, it is true ; but things happen even with those who can pull big wires." I had told him I wanted to go out and stay on one of the ships. He asked how long, and I said, while he gripped me : "As long, sir, as you will give me leave to stay."

Then he walked back with me, stood a moment thoughtful. "A week do?" he asked, and the smile that accompanied the question made me giddy. Of course I said it would be heaven, at which he smiled more broadly. "Some of them don't appear to think so" seemed to be behind that smile ; but he did not say the words.

In another five minutes I was outside the door, elated as when I emerged from my last examination with the "bluepaper" signed, sealed, and delivered for which I had fought.

A launch nuzzled the end of a pier waiting to take

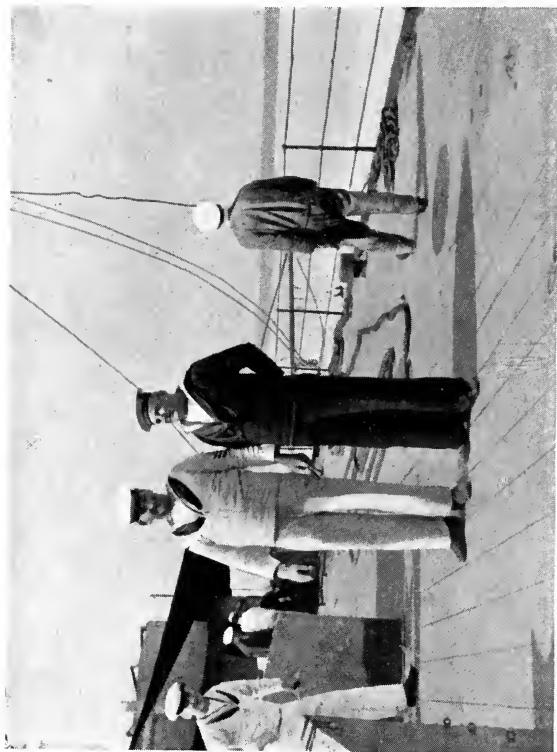
me off, when I reached the edge of the Firth. The sea sparkled in sunlight, and tiny white curls out there where the ships lay told me the breeze was fresh.

Until this moment I had imagined the Fleet ; but now it lay spread out in glorious panorama, grey shape towering beyond grey shape ; squadron beyond squadron, both up and down that stretch of scintillating water. The Firth was at its best, the hills clear, a blue sky where yesterday a mist had lain. There were the battleships, there the screen of cruisers and destroyers which moved with them when under way. Pricking the blue were the strange tripod masts with their armoured tops and controls, like giant crows' nests perched high above the deck. Beyond were more tripods, more masts, some crowned with a flag, others with a rainbow hoist flicking in the breeze—some talking serenely with arms which swung to and fro, making all conceivable angles ; others quiet, without flags except for the ensign which stood out aft.

Lanes of ships from the "duty trot" squadron out there, small against the eastern sea line, to the giants standing motionless under the hills of Scotland far up the Firth—all gleaming in that radiant day, guns pointed, lean and menacing for offence. And down the lanes, or up, moved the picket-boats, duty-cutters, barges pulled by bluejackets, carrying to and from the shore supplies for the Fleet.

In twenty minutes I was alongside the flagship and for the first time acknowledging that a mammoth may be beautiful. Her name * was so well known that all the world has trembled at her adventures. In the early days she came very near the ditch, as

* *Queen Elizabeth.*



TWO CONQUERORS.



THE CONQUEROR'S LAUNCH.

sailors say, in an adventure wholly heroic but impossible.

Tennyson's lines haunted me as I climbed her gangway thinking of this—

“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die,”

then I was on her deck, her long guns pointing out overhead, gleaming in the sunshine, and cognisant of a group of young officers keeping their watch as in the old days when quarter-decks had more space.

They must get very sick of seeing importunate strangers armed with passes, who come upon them to pry into their life. If they do, they hide it very delightfully. They are the quintessence of kindness, thought, and geniality. One cannot imagine them trying to hide things about which even among themselves they do not talk. As a matter of fact, naval officers brandish no air of mystery. They say of such and such a subject: “Ah! that's one of the things we don't discuss.” There are no verbal subtleties in the matter. Osborne and Dartmouth have done their work well, not only as to the theories, but as to the facts which go to make good citizens.

I was already in the hands of a lieutenant, as like my companion on the way to the Commander-in-Chief as one pea is like another; and with him I was going downstairs to see the Captain of the Fleet, Commodore Brand.

On the threshold I halted, struck, as I had been on crossing the quarter-deck, by the beauty of this cabin. I use the word intentionally, for I know ships and am accustomed to the stereotype cabin of competition. This was square and open in some way to sunshine. It was filled with light and warmth from big open ports—homelike. Flowers were on

the table, ornaments, books, cigarettes, exactly as in well-kept chambers in town. A bunk or sleeping place of any sort was invisible. A fireplace was there, radiating sunlight from its brasses, easy-chairs, comfort; and as I entered the Captain of the Fleet met me, as all did when I came upon them, with a genial phrase and—the cigarette-box.

I am afraid I sampled many cigarettes in my wanderings and gave few away. I should have liked to remain in that room the whole morning, effaced, utterly forgotten, so that I might have worked out the theories of governance which must come to one fresh from the laxity and brawl of great towns. The room, you see, where a man sits and works or gives orders is invested with an atmosphere from which new comers cannot escape—from which, indeed, some of us do not seek to escape.

This cabin appealed to me as did the sitting-room of a commodore on the East Coast with whom I talked one night when guns were booming over the sea and a bitter wind howled at us from the north-east. That room held me, so did the commodore and his trophies won from sea and air; relics of crushed U-boats, of blazed Gothas and Zeppelins fashioned at his desire into ornaments and things of use. All were so finely wrought that one turned in astonishment to find still other marvels culled from bombs and the devilish and wonderful mechanism by which they are detonated.

It was there I saw rare books and glass that would make a collector shiver; which made me shiver for their safety, there on that exposed sea-front where streets of houses were empty, scores with the windows blown in, some wrecked for all time.

I pointed this out, and the commodore said: "Of course they are beautiful. I keep them by me

because they are beautiful. . . . Some night perhaps a shell will come in and smash the lot—me with them. . . . Well, we shall go together, and I shall have had the delight of living with them to the end.

“War is so ghastly that a man must put aside the hermit’s cowl. I shall not go sooner for their presence, . . . but when the hour strikes. So, too, will you, and all either of us can do will not alter that. . . . Besides,” he added, “it makes us forget sometimes what is going on all round us. It keeps one sane, if you like . . . able to carry on.”

I agreed. I think, too, that the room which held us must have been imbued with the spirit and soul of the great man who lived in it.

So here on this super-Dreadnought, as we have come to term what replaces the man-o’-war of our youth. She had been through the Dardanelles stunt, as it is irreverently called, and had been enveloped in smoke and flame there as well as at Jutland. How, then, was it impossible that nothing could be read of her stress, of the impact of shells, of the mines and torpedoes she had escaped, of the rattle of quick-firing guns—perhaps even there in the sunlit room we occupied? The dent caused by a shell sets the mind roving in other fields than those concerned entirely with strain and impact. Visions of those blinded or maimed arise . . . and in the background the effect of it all on homes, on the masses, on those who cry for peace where no peace can come.

You understand, naturally, that these suggestions scarcely arrived through the medium of our talk. One cannot enter a stranger’s room, and begin by visualising events and individuals, without, on a battleship, coming in contact with a Marine carrying a fixed bayonet. For that reason, if for no other, we

talked, as the Frenchman said, "in order that we might conceal our thoughts." What else is possible? Even in peace time there are conventions.

And upon our talk came the admiral to hearten me for further effort, shall we say, by speaking of an effort of the past. I shall not soon forget his brisk words of praise, nor the kindness which made him seek me out to speak them.

Then arose a discussion between admiral and commodore as to where I was to go. It seemed to resolve itself into a toss-up. The notion was to get me where people knew something more of books than those others. It appeared immaterial to me, because, you comprehend, there are as many kinds of books as there are ships at sea, and the only kind that count are those which people do not read.

The curious part about this question of which ship was to be my home is that when I had made my number I found in the wardroom* a young officer who knew me and would have been able to vouch, at all events, for my identity had my passports failed. The difference resulting is exactly similar to that of a new comer arriving in town with introductions or without, but accentuated by the fact that this was a super-Dreadnought of the B Squadron of the Grand Fleet, and the country was at war.

In the wardroom that night we dined with folk who might have stepped directly from the pages of "Naval Occasions." "Bartimeus" requires no recognition from me; yet I like to remember the day when first I became acquainted with him. It was in the lounge of an hotel at Hindhead. We had just finished tea and I was seeking something to throw me out of the rut. Then, on a side-table, I saw this book "Naval Occasions," opened it

* H.M.S. *Conqueror*.

with simple indifference, sampled it, as one does something one does not know, pocketed it, and got away quietly to enjoy myself. I owed that debt to "Bartimeus," and I am glad to pay it—for I succeeded in being late for dinner.

The note of a bugle blared across the flats and instantly men sprang to the hatchways. The sun had gone, and in place of it was a thin mist which for hours had kept us prisoners when we had decided on a cruise.

Now something had happened, perhaps, to free us. I came out with the rest and heard a voice shouting "Anchor stations" somewhere above us, followed by "Tumble up! Shake a leg!"

The lower deck shivered, expecting a bath. "Saltash luck!" some one ejaculated, passing on the stairs; and then, as though in confutation of it, a voice proclaimed: "Why, it's clearing! Cheer-o!"

This was true. The beads of moisture strung out along rails and ridge-ropes quivered and dropped in a new light. Shadows appeared on the wet decks, men were busy with squeegees and swabs, the arms of a semaphore were swinging without pause; the windlass already at work bundling in chain. I saw the padre moving up and down a quiet section of the deck and joined him. We talked of discipline, the necessity that exists, even now, that it should be recognised, until the squadron was under way. Then I climbed to the bridge.

The promise of sunlight seemed likely to go no farther. It was thinner, as we say at sea—that is, we could see our next astern always, and at intervals the whole squadron; the foothills we could see, but the heights had their cap on—a streaming white mist which was of the clouds.

A fleet of modern warships is wonderful in any light ; but when the mist creeps down and flickers in patches upon the waters it is a picture at once of sterling quality and marvellous control.

Not one of those battleships carried less than a thousand men, some more. A thousand individuals, each of them imbued with hopes which are common to all, aspirations which may or may not be accomplished, a desire for the end of this ghastliness and a resolute decision that it can only be reached through war.

Discipline teaches many things besides toeing the line. Through discipline of body you obtain discipline of thought : you learn to reason clearly.

Make no mistake about it. Sailors and soldiers understand exactly what we are fighting for. They know that if a draw, as it is called, were forced upon us we should lose our freedom. They know, as only those can who are immersed in the duties entailed by war, that when we took up arms we did so because it was better to fight Germany in company with our Allies than to fight her when those Allies were crushed. They have seen the German machine at work and know that for once the politicians were right when they refused the advice of those who would have had the nation squirm out. They understand something, too, of the difficulty of fighting under democratic leading, but are sufficiently inured by discipline to comprehend that one man can lead where a dozen will only palter.

Much has been said of the democratisation of the Army and even, tentatively, of the Navy, but those who see at long range the wobblings of democracy understand the fallacy of it. They work in the Fleet under an autocracy which is nearly unlimited, and

they know that by no other process could battles be won, fleets practised, supplied, or kept fit.

Autocracy can concentrate on its objective without considering the advice of a score of wire-pullers all in leading strings to the party system. A man who is an autocrat, who is in command, may be fallible, but he has reached his position through a process of elimination which has rejected the unfit. On the other hand, you have the sum of a score or a hundred fallibilities, each of which has climbed to power by the exercise of argument practised so glibly that presently each stands uncertain of the truth.

The autocrat moves alone, or in conjunction with two or three proved efficient. If he falls, he falls. But the odds are against his falling when he is pitted against *messieurs les doctrinaires*, folk with glib tongues who prostrate fact before theory, quake at the notion of force, and shake impotent words on those who adopt it.

Part of the day, as we moved out through the mist, I spent with my lieutenant friend creeping about the turrets and the machinery that works both turrets and guns. I was shown what happened if I pulled this lever, what occurred if I pressed the other. I saw the tubes and pistons and heard the hiss of pressure which enabled a man to swing and tilt those ponderous guns with as much ease as if they had been dumb-bells. Yet I confess I came away with a feeling of appalling ignorance.

It was the same when I was shown the working of quick-firer guns in Commodore Tyrwhitt's flagship. The captain of marines explained each movement, how to sight, how to find the range, what to do when the control gave you an order, and demonstrated part of it. He explained the special juice

which manipulated the various parts and what to do if she was rolling gunwale under, and I came away with the feeling of one lost in a maze. The truth is the modern gun is every whit as complex as the modern ship. That is why gunners and sailors used to take six or seven years in the making. How much a novice in machinery would be able to carry away would harm no one but himself—especially if he were put into the hands of a lecturer who was word-perfect and swift of speech.

After we had done with the turrets and turned off the juice which worked them, I was taken into a part of the ship which is honestly eerie, where you want to be afflicted with no imagination lest you see ghosts of a quality not entirely diaphanous.

It was my first visit to the magazine of a great ship, curious and interesting beyond words. To my companion it was commonplace: but he happened to be a gunner. I confess the descent gave me an inkling of what the place must be. We scraped through manholes, obtained a key at a certain place, descended perpendicular ladders of the kind one imagines must be in use in Hades, in a stillness so profound that to breathe seemed unwise; came past weird curtain things of the kind of cloth the gun crews wear in action, things that closed softly as you entered and gave you the impression of being lost, hidden away for all time in some refrigerating chamber where no sound could come.

Then when we had reached the inner heart of the ship and were moving about among rolls of cordite and shells with red noses which peered out from countless racks, and felt that quiet was the one essential, it was startling to hear the clash of the ammunition hoist and the cage which came for shells—startling to see the rolls of cordite slung about;

and one became anxious to get outside the place so that it might be possible to breathe without fear of producing catastrophe.

Of course I am speaking figuratively in these matters. What I wish to impress is that a sense of catastrophe is present to the mind—not exactly in the sense of fear of accident, but by the realisation of the enormous embodiment of force grinning at you all round. You realise for the first time, I think, what it must mean if a shell bursts anywhere in the neighbourhood of a magazine. And if you are holding in your arms perhaps seventy-five pounds of cordite, it does not impress you with its impotence if you are told it will only burn quite slowly, and that if it takes fire it is no use to sit on it or try to smother it, for it likes smotheration.

As a matter of fact you feel you are in the wrong box and don't very much care how soon you get out of it. That is why imagination is not of much service in a battleship. Perhaps the silence adds to the impression, the appliances on every hand for swift obliteration of all this deadliness. "You can flood the magazine in so many seconds," said my friend, "by turning that lever," and instantly I set myself to puzzle out where the "you" would be if flooding became essential.

The mist of half-knowledge was infinitely more burdensome to me than the mist which lay over the squadron when we emerged. I required a smoke after that experience, and, as the lieutenant was free to see I came to no harm, we discussed cigarettes together while the squadron steamed at full speed past a target and demolished it with concentrated gunfire.

That gave me an inkling of what occurred at the Battle of Tushima, where the Japanese fleet lay

waiting the approach of Rodjesvensky's forlorn hope, and I asked what weight of metal was represented by the vessels acting in control. He made a rough calculation and told me something enormous in thousands of pounds. "Of course," he added, "we are using sub-calibre now; but I am giving the fighting weight . . . No, I agree, I shouldn't care to be in range of the squadron to-day. I should expect to be scuppered."

Control.

That in more senses than one is the aim of captain and admiral, petty officer or boy, standing in his strange and inquisitorial shroud behind a gun-shield in battle. Without concentration of fire a fleet may spend its force in the air; therefore, we who speak openly of individuality have perfected control and made it subjective to individuality. Without singleness of purpose neither battleship nor admiral can obtain the full value of armaments. All orders emanate from one who is supreme. If in his judgment it be necessary to move whither our fathers have gone, the fleet obeys. There are no tongues raised in clamour, no talk, no argument, no leader of this, that or the other section of those ordered—for in the Navy men have learned that obedience is the first duty of citizenship, that without it is chaos.

It is only when the enemy has gone to pieces that individuality can safely be set loose; and then only on the understanding that each commander is in command.

Imagine the chaos of an unordered fight with modern warships and their attendant units—the scramble for personal glory or personal belief; the rush hither or thither; the talk and gesticulation which would ensue perhaps on hustings at present comfortably out of sight; the wrack and turmoil of

a Navy out of control morally as well as actually—but you cannot imagine it. Lack of control is chaos; chaos is disorder, a shapeless mass. You cannot conceive a Navy in that guise.

Deep in the heart of all battleships is a room known as the transmitting station, where I spent some hours both in the heat of battle practice and when the ship was steaming. It is said that the captain and the chief yeoman run the ship, and I have testified to what I have seen; but in action there is another factor, the transmitting station, without which I question whether she could be fought. It is a room perhaps twelve feet long and five feet wide, filled with tubes and brass and copper mouthpieces which yawn eternally and seem to leer. It is papered with coils of insulated wire and tubes, studded with plugs, buttons, levers, and electric plant. It is a sort of witch-chamber into which are whispered the secrets of a fight, messages from the gun-turrets, control, bridge, and the crews of this or that station put into communication with unseen fighters by men sitting on stools and wearing "flash" helmets against possible shells.

Here the various officers of control work blindly, as do the men in the engine-room and stokehold beyond—hear little but the gong signals, the voices calling through tubes from the world of light and air they have left. Here, too, they obey orders acknowledge whisperings, watch pointers, known as indicators, which twist and beckon, whilst others silently confirm and carry out in a sweating heat all the knowledge they have acquired in their climb from Osborne.

Discipline tells here as no other power could. These men are doing at length, for you and me and

all who live in comfort here, just that for which during long years they have prepared. They are the brain and the co-ordinating machine of the ship, and they go to their little spring-back stools and sit there quietly in an atmosphere of oppression, which alone is a burden during the ghastliness of a modern sea-fight. If the bridge goes which controls this control, if the control, which is sometimes called the fighting-top, comes crashing from its tripod of steel, another *point d'appui* is secured, another officer takes the place of admiral or vice-admiral, and the whisperings, the gong strokes, the silent indicators go on; the co-ordinators continue to co-ordinate until the end, when in a vast surge of fire the giant ship reels and takes her last dive.

In Nelson's day there was scope for individualism; but now that individuals have been merged in the machine there is room for obedience only. Nothing less—even when men stand on the brink of the pit. Nothing less—unless you are prepared to put the safety of an individual before the safety of the country which gave him birth.

We stand to-day once again in need of plain speech, of a man who will lead the nation without truckling to the party system, a man who will stand forth and speak openly of the nation's peril.

The country fumes with impatience in certain known areas because it is called upon to face privations which it terms "the limit." Leaders of various units who find themselves powerful, harangue and gesticulate with "war aims" for their text. The papers they favour pat them on the back and seem inclined to press class against class. "Ninety something per cent. of those who are fighting for us belong to the wage-earning class," one announces

with a push at the patriotism of those who are not wage-earners. Men club together to evade service of any sort but the service for self. They defy government by a thousand subtle manœuvres. Others realise a conscience to which hitherto they have been strangers. Some blithely commit an offence the punishment of which is prison, but having learned the "woman-trick" go on hunger strike and emerge in due course triumphant if thin. Men who are in the position of legislators stand up in their place in the House and hector Ministers who, it appears, are not urgent to be embroiled.

All this is the negation of government and a direct incentive to those who quibble. Sailors understand these posturings. They know what they have been called upon to endure. They know that if it had not been for the Fleet, luckily mobilised and ready, and the imperishable First Seven Divisions, the British people would have been treated to the same slaughtering, ravaging, and concentrated bestiality as the Belgians, French, Serbs, and all those who stood to defend their motherland from brute force. They know precisely what kind of fight could have been organised, if Germany had been able to get through; how many Englishmen would have suffered the penalty of taking up arms and trusting to a brassard; how the women and children and homes would have suffered. They know, because they have been in contact with the Blonde-Beast since August, 1914. And they know the cry that would have gone up to the stars if the Navy *had* failed to hold the gate against invasion.

"But," they ask, "why am I singled out to fight for people who refused to prepare and therefore are the first cause of this war?" Because from motives of patriotism, or a hatred of towns, I chose to enlist,

and I, who am an officer, chose to go to Osborne, is that any reason why you who are equally fit should refuse the duties of citizenship? They put the position very plainly, these sailors who are accustomed to discipline. They say there would have been no war if National Service had been adopted; no war if Ministers had spoken plainly when the War-Lord was brandishing his sword. They see no difference in the contending parties. Unionist, Liberal, Conservative, Radical—all refused to touch this question either of defence or definite pronouncement; and they see that war was the outcome—France overrun, Belgium a desert, the British nation in danger of what is called starvation.

They knew of that tortuous scheme, hatched in Germany and taken to the hearts of British statesmen, called euphemistically the Declaration of London, knew that it was within an ace of ratification, that it hamstrung the Navy in the early days of the war. They have seen ships stopped, sent into port laden with merchandise which was contraband, released and set humming for the neutral who was Germany in being. They have endured rigours and hardships in silence, have seen their messmates succumb to them in the ordeal of patrol duty, and they have continued resolute.

They have seen their comrades of the Merchant Service compelled by our lack of armaments, and to appease pacifist or neutral, to go to sea without guns, and have watched through a haze of dull anger the slaughter which followed. They have seen them in their boats, corpses some, torn with shell-fire others, mad from contact with the grim sea and grimmer foe, and have carried some to their ports, put others over-side, and have remained resolute in their decision to break with Germany, all things German, man or

boy, woman or child ; to render them no honour, to shut out the cheap nastiness with which hitherto we have been deluged.

But now there comes a hint of action, born of what subterranean force they do not know, which shall place the German on a footing of equal citizenship with the British people. Sailors do not dabble in politics, but they read of those who do. They are a long way from the heart of the thing and see more clearly in consequence. They are concerned at the trend of all this talk. They know nothing of agreement by "self-determination," for they are but recently enfranchised and are very credulous as to the result. They scent argument and are trained neither for the hustings nor the law courts.

They saw that men who should be at the front or in the Fleet were permitted to demand revision of the terms upon which they engaged. Heard of men earning eight, ten, and twelve pounds a week ; knew of the profiteers, the thousands engaged in subtly abstracting from the national purse sums which seemed fabulous.

And they remembered, among other things, that the war was three years old before any increase of pay was granted to seamen, any help given for the wife and kiddies at home, and that when it came it had no likeness to the grants which had been made in other spheres.

They remembered, too, that when the Boer War came to an end we "retrenched" those whom we no longer needed, and that the nation, by its silence, seemed to acquiesce. They knew of the pride that filled us when at length we wore down the opposing forces—saw men who had given up everything to enlist broken now in health and at the end of their tether ; told them to buck up, that the country

would see them tended. But the country which had wrung them dry took no further heed of the matter. It sat down to count the cost and to cut its losses.

The nation knew that its action was mean; but it was glamourised by those who laboured to prove that justice was done. We were tired of war and wanted to get back to our comforts. We refused to believe we were mean. We shut our eyes on the cry of those who had suffered and pretended we did not hear.

We are constantly reminded in the Press and elsewhere that when the men come home from the fronts they will come with new ideals, new notions of their worth, and a general condemnation of the conditions which prevailed in the early years of this century. That seems to be accepted as just.

But there is another side—the sailors' side, Navy and Merchant Service. The majority of these men will not come home, in the sense that Tommy and his officers will return from the front. They are sailors and will remain sailors. They are the men upon whom the nation relies when it is in a tight place. But for these men and their equivalent in the old Army the nation would not now exist. The country would be a shambles similar to France and all those countries like Serbia and Belgium which have been wiped from the map.

Are sailors prepared to acquiesce in a new edition of the state of affairs which led to this war—to the hectoring of this section of voters, this section of pacifists, this atrophied contemptibility or that, who knows nothing of governance or discipline but aims at leadership; which prevents the wise accumulation of war material in peace time lest we should in producing ammunition produce war;

which prevents sanity and plain speech ; looks to the register and forgets the men who will be sent out to face death ?

Are they prepared to continue their devotion to a nation which forgets their existence until it becomes necessary to fire the guns ? Are they prepared to be tied again by things called "declarations," by the new specific and heal-all called "self-determination," or "our war aims," or indeed, any of the nostrums now on the dissecting table for the production of an unstable peace ? Are they agreed that it is wise to acquiesce in a system which permits a man to refuse to fight for his country and differentiates against those who volunteer ?

There are many problems in the air, many thoughts stirring in the brains of those who have fought.

There are thousands of men now serving in various sections of the Fleet who, when the war ends, will come back as those will who fight in the trenches, in Palestine and in Macedonia. They are men who were called to the colours in July, 1914, reservists, volunteers by the thousand, "dug-outs" from here and from over-sea, who, in countless instances, have lost all they possessed, house, farm, money, and have earned wounds or shattered constitutions in place of it. There are the fishermen who came in to fish for mines instead of fish. There are the men of the Merchant Service, the Bottle-fillers of a nation which knew little of their existence and cared less in pre-war days. There are the countless doctors and paymasters, harbour officers, liaison officers who will come back—all of them with first-hand knowledge ; all of them bitten by war . . . a war which need not have been.

Are we to suppose they will barter their experience

and sit down with the pacifist, the profiteer, the countless throng who are making money out of the war and "having the time of their lives"? Are we to presume they will accept the pacifist minimum that there shall be no punishment for Germany, no word of reproach, no restitution for murder on the high seas and arson on land; none for the rapine and sacrilege and bestial desecration—crimes ordered by an all-powerful War-Lord and delighted in by a nation of ghouls . . . no restitution for women and children and men flung piecemeal upon the sea, shelled in open boats, stripped and made to stand on the narrow deck of a submarine while the commander went below, flattened his nose at a conning-tower scuttle, and watched the sight when the boat dived . . . no restitution for the murder of *Lusitania* and her baby victims, none for the *Persia*, the *Arabic*, the *Ancona*, the hospital ships and a thousand beside? No apology, no white sheet . . . no punishment.

Are the Macdonalds and Snowdens and Morels of this world to be the persons who shall decide what are to be the war aims of the British nation . . . are the Dominions to be shut out of the discussion—the men who have fought—in order that there may be no exacerbation or humiliation of Germany?

For myself I am content to believe that Germany may be safely left to her throes; that some day when we are hard pressed a man will stand forth and make an end of the quibblers, even as Cromwell made an end of those who talked from benches in the Long Parliament of other days.

I have seen the Fleet in being, its calm and discipline, the manner of those who lead it, the attitude of those led.

It is the same Fleet that I have seen assembled at

Spithead for pageant, quiet, strong, and very sure of its strength ; the same that I have met at sea, at Malta, Gibraltar, East, West, South. It is of the same breed as when in days of trial it steamed, under the command of Admiral Hornby, cleared for action, through the Dardanelles ; the same that stood for us when it became necessary to bring Indian troops to the assistance of Turkey ; which flung down the walls of Alexandria and held the ring while America dealt with Spain.

I have seen it in all lights, and it is fine in each, in all climes, and found it adaptable in each ; in rough and smooth seas ; in mist, rain, the blackness of a gale ; rounding up slave dhows, scorching in the Red Sea, panting in the Gulf, and always I have found it the quintessence of resource.

It does not talk. It is a bad hand at argument. It finds some amusement in reading of those who do both. It is occupied to-day in a war which is the equivalent of half a dozen wars : yet the burden which lies upon it is but a synonym for the victory it will achieve.

And if not victory—then death, so that honour remain to it for all time.

That is the naval way.

GATHERING THE DEVIL'S GRAPES.

Ever seen the Sweepers, punching through the brine,
Rusty little Sweepers that clip the tethered mine ;
Chatted with the skipper walking on her bridge,
Screened your eyes and blessed her when she nosed
it in a ridge ?

Guns upon the quarter and guns on fo'c'sle head,
All tricked out with ensigns to earn their daily bread ;
South about from Los'toft to Inner Gabbard tongue,
I saw the Fleet go steaming with sweeps between
them strung.

Seas came up from south-east, the wind, at half a
gale,
Sneezing thro' the rigging with snow and sleet and
hail ;
Sands lined white with spindrift, buoys flung hard
a-lee,
Tucking noses under as though they feared the sea ;

*For mines were in the Fairway, the Ship's way, the
King's way,
And all the traffic turned from Sunk to Ald'brough
Napes ;
While Cottier of the "Mount's Bay," the old, converted
"Mount's Bay,"
Was moving down with strung wire to clip the devil's
grapes.*

Midway down the Channel with Shipwash Sands
abeam,
Fleet strung out for battle and churning up the
cream,
Dodger, out to starboard, signalled he had found
Drift mines sagging brawly and opened for a round.

Banged the fo'c'sle head gun and banged the skipping
shell,

While Cottier signalled over to give them merry Hell,
And crept along with taut wire, buried in the brine,
Keen to make a clean sweep and let the *Dodger* shine.

Dark came on them early and still the mines were
free,

For shooting from a platform that's licked by every
sea,

Shooting in a blizzard with every finger numb,
Is not the same as footer or shooting from a scrum.

Wet and sore and bleeding they dodged the ding-dong
night,

Lying on their beam ends with snow to paint them
white ;

Lurching in the tideway, losing sticks and boom,
Climbing now to Heaven, now lurching to the tomb ;

*For mines were in the Fairway, the Ship's way, the
King's way,*

*And all the traffic turned from Sunk to Ald'brough
Napes ;*

*While Cottier of the "Mount's Bay," the old, converted
"Mount's Bay,"*

*Was moving down with strung wire to clip the devil's
grapes.*

Then out upon the seas there peeped a blear-eyed
dawn,

And Cottier sent his message to reap the devil's
spawn,

To reap it of the mountains that curled and licked
and grew,

Leaping in the shallows as fast the spindrift flew.

So *Dodger* out to starboard started with his gun,
 Blazed a mine instanter *and touched the horns of one*
Lying near his counter, unseen amidst the spume,
 That hurled him up to glory upon a smoky plume . . .

Splayed the little *Dodger*, slimly, in a squall,
 Cut and bashed and squat her before a man could
 bawl ;
 Threw her forth in fragments, coal and steel and
 skin—
 For Sorters up in Heaven to shape and mould and
 pin.

Then boats upon the Highway, the Ship's way, the
 King's way,
And all the traffic held from Sunk to Ald'brough Napes,
With Cottier of the "Mount's Bay," the old, converted
 "Mount's Bay,"
Standing up to steer them and search the floating shapes.

The seas came at them headlong with hiss and curl
 of spume,
 A squall rose high above them with flakes to dim the
 gloom,
 To palsy them and 'fright them, and hide the things
 that swirled
 Here away, there away, upon the sea-crests hurled ;

It hailed the new-found ginger, it yapped and raved
 and swore,
 It towered in the blackness—they plied the ashen
 oar ;
 It took them by the throttle, it strove with tyranny
 To open wide the door which stood for them *in*
 limine.

A voice wailed in the chaos, "Ahoy! Ahoy!" it
cried,
And Cottier of the *Mount's Bay* came round with
oars that plied;
Drove his cobble sidelong, drove her cheering strong,
Out on the booming swatchway, out where seas were
long.

Saved a *Dodger* 'prentice lad, a boy whose leg was
torn,
Took him in and stopped the flow like surgeon-healer
born,
And crept about with snowflakes sizzling in the wash
Of seas and blood and spindrift amidst the gloom and
slosh.

Then back upon the *Mount's Bay* to pray and carry on,
Back to wrestle grimly, to watch and warn and con—
To stick it in a blizzard in spite of messmates lost,
To dredge the German toadstool with which the way
was crossed.

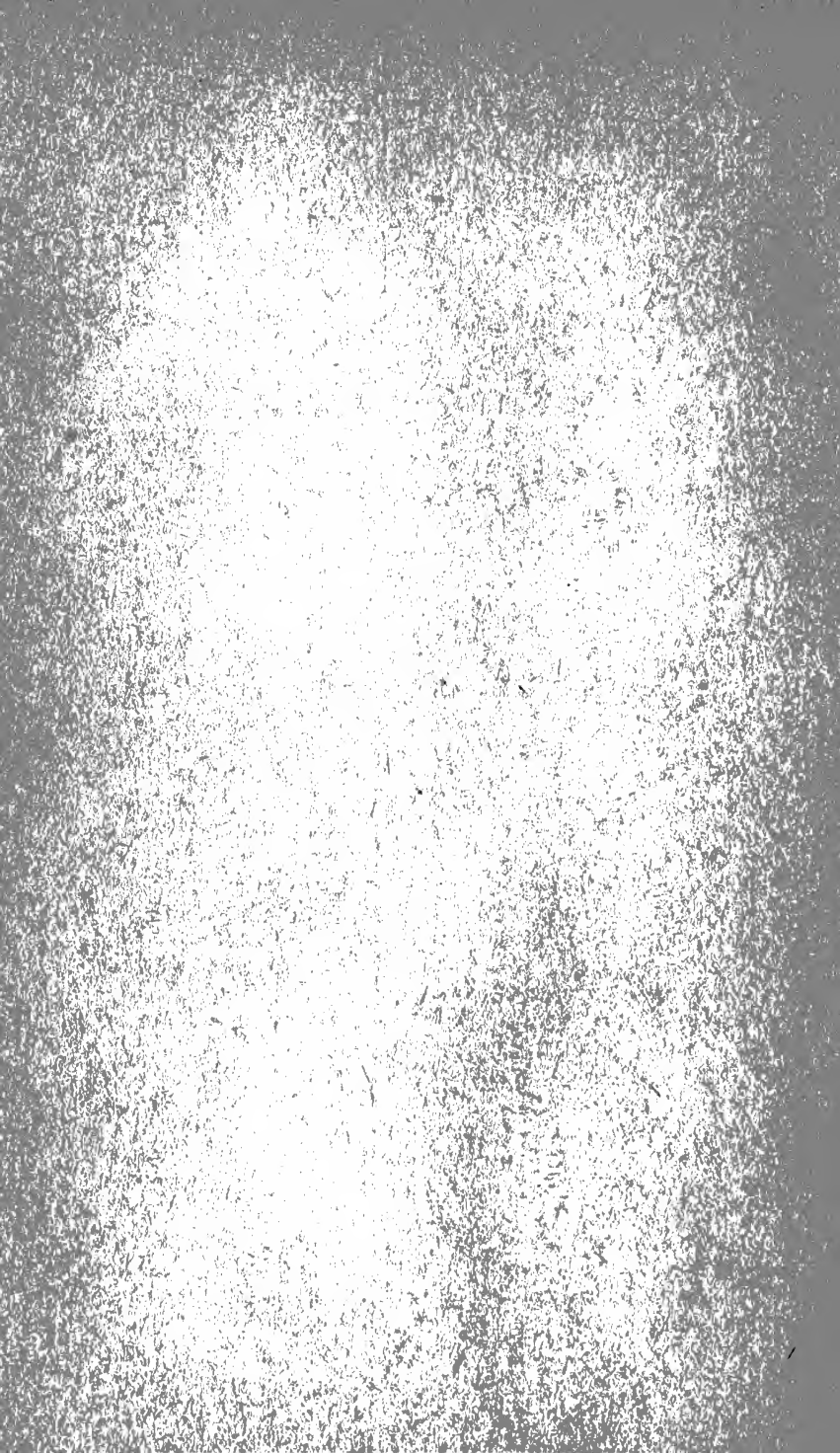
And ready on the *Mount's Bay* to give the word and
dredge,
Three days and nights of giant's work with every
boat on edge,
Steadied by an Admiral, a Fisherman at home,
Gentle with the childer but stern upon the foam;

Till "Clear upon the Highway, the Ship's way, the
King's way,"

By wireless thro' the gale, "from Sunk to Ald'brough
Shoal,"

And Cottier of the "*Mount's Bay*," the old, converted
"*Mount's Bay*,"

With ensigns at half-mast filed in past Lo'stoft mole.



Press Opinions of Works by Edward Noble

"THE EDGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE."—"Neither Mr. Kipling nor Mr. Conrad has produced a story of the sea more enthralling or more convincingly true."—*Bookman*.

"This is a book of altogether remarkable and outstanding merit. It is a novel of a sort which does not always reach the reviewer, even once a year. It is a piece of literature."—*Athenæum*.

"WAVES OF FATE."—" . . . And what is it made of, this story with the salt of the ocean, the hiss of sprays and the whistle of wind stamping its pages with the real sea-faring life of to-day, especially on board a wind-jammer; flesh and blood characterisation; life with its natural plots—those currents of effort that rise and set across each other, making plot and counterplot that are too simple and too subtle for mere sensationalist to handle; dialogue that is true to the characters—which is crisp and sparkling, yet natural; some bitter satirical truths on literature, art and music; a satire in the shape of a nautical trial on the collision, two real and most lovable children, limned with a freshness that is childhood itself; and the whole warped together in a deft, workmanlike manner."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"THE GRAIN CARRIERS."—"It ought to take its place among epoch-making books, like 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and 'The Jungle.'"—*Manchester Dispatch*.

"A story intensely fascinating and moving in itself, an eloquent, accusing voice makes itself heard."—*Bookman*.

"It is an epic of heroism, with a dirge-like note running through its splendid texture. In fact, the story, while in nowise losing value as a story, is a masterly study of its particular subject."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"It does not take a seaman to be impressed by this book. It has the very spirit of the sea in every page. You taste brine as you read, and you shiver in the icy wind as you sit by the fire. Mr. Joseph Conrad is equalled here if not excelled. In spite of the talk of 'parrels' and other fearful wild-fowl unknown to landsmen one lives through and understands every inch of the ghastly and pitiful fight made by the *Padrone*. It is a novel with a purpose, and a grim one. Never yet has so fierce a sledge-hammer attack been made on the conditions of the British Merchant Service on board grain-carrying ships. However good his cause may be, Mr. Noble never drags it in with damage to his style. His book is strong and alive—tragic, horrible, but inspired."—*Observer*.

"LORDS OF THE SEA."—"Mr. Edward Noble looks out upon the world of shipping with something of the air of Balzac surveying Paris. His vision is wide. He is very sure of himself; he has a quick and penetrating eye. He gives to his reader the sense that he sees and understands it all. One gets the feeling from this book that he is a shipowner in a large way, with nervous imagination and a fine literary power. . . . The great merit of the book is the vastness of its suggestion. All those little, tiny figures pulling wires and speaking down tubes are in front of the great background of commerce. The book is like the hymn of Liverpool. It is more intelligible when it deals with ships and operations than when it tries to explain the moving of the human heart. It is especially eloquent when it tells of the North Atlantic . . . of the *Ailsa Craig's* passage to and from New York. Mr. Noble writes magnificently. There is no other word for it. Mr. Conrad did something of the same kind in 'Typhoon.' Mr. Noble's work ranks with that masterpiece."—J. M. in *Manchester Guardian*.

"CHAINS."—"Mr. Noble has earned a well-deserved place among those who tell in vigorous, biting phrase of raw humanity, struggling with itself or with Nature in the wild places of the world, and in one or two of his stories of the sea he has levelled his lance at abuses. . . . Despite the author's graphic gift of narrative, Betty and

her doings do not rouse us to any great excitement. Nor is it here that Mr. Noble has his lesson. That is to be found in the kernel of the book—four chapters in its centre which give a vivid and terrible insight into the practices of the ‘white slave’ traffic in a South American town. Mr. Noble’s sincerity is unquestionable; but the book is not of course one for the young person.”—*The Times*.

“DUST FROM THE LOOM.”—“The theme of this story is one of the oldest, but so adroitly manipulated that its interest never flags, and one does not realise even dimly what an old, old theme it is, after all, until one has reached the end. So it would not be fair to disclose the plot. It is enough to commend the tale for its instant, strong appeal to those primitive emotions in all of us, which thrill us and make us want to laugh and melt us to the sentimental mood. And this result is really due to certain tricks of style; the style of Mr. Noble’s writing is at once incisive and picturesque, vehement and at the same time restrained. Nor does the book lack humour. In *Liseta* we have yet another variant of the old serving-woman, but she is none the less original for that. A case-hardened reviewer confesses to having read this book through at a single sitting—and it is quite a long book—and to have found refreshment and entertainment in every page of it.”—*Bookman*.

“THE BOTTLE-FILLERS.”—“Our first thought after reading this compelling story of the sea was the pity that it would not be read by the public who get their bottles filled at the risk of the best men the nation breeds. That, even if read, would the public believe it; but somehow we believe they will, as the nation is at last aware of the value of our Merchant Service, and are now inclined to look on a sailor as a brother man. The story deals principally with the subject of deck-loads, and in this book we are shown how these are found to be the cause of numerous disasters and the careers of many promising officers blasted through no fault of their own by that awful bugbear of an officer’s life, ‘The Black List.’ For years in the *Nautical* we have thrashed out the question of deck-loads, but here, in ‘The Bottle-

Fillers,' the subject is invested with some romance attached to it owing to the living presence of men and women. One paragraph of many we feel we must quote :— ' O'Hagan walked with disaster shadowing him, dogging his steps. He knew, if others do not, that there is no Order for bravery at sea, no Star, nothing comparable to the V.C. of the Army. He knew of course that the Royal Humane Society's Medal was a possible incentive, if incentive be required. He knew, too, of the chronometer-balanced watch of Lloyd's and the Board of Trade, of the stereotyped presentation and silly speeches ; but he knew of no Star.

" " " Foreign countries can find a Star for their sailor heroes," he commented, tramping, head sunk, for the rainbow funnel ; " the German Emperor can summon officers of his Mercantile Marine to Berlin and bestow with his own hands the German Star for bravery at sea ; but authority in England is averse to the bestowal of high orders or honour on men of her Mercantile Marine ; and the Foreign Office has been known to add its thunder." "

" We trust this book will be read by those ' plaster saints ' who sit at home comfortably, taking little heed of the men who carry food to our tables, and that their thoughts will go over the waters to these brave fellows, making ' stay-at-homes ' wonder if such things really exist."—*Nautical Magazine*.

" I doubt if anything of its kind has ever been better done than the latter half of this book, which is, indeed, masterly."—J. E. PATTERSON in *Daily Chronicle*.

" It is as grim and powerful a tragedy of the sea as any we have read."—*Athenæum*.

" What Balzac did for Paris, Mr. Noble achieves for the men of the Merchant Service. He reveals to our land-locked imaginations, with the unerring fidelity of a master, the life and mind of a hidden world. It is sailors of the Denis O'Hagan type, the captains courageous of the sea who have given their quota of blood without quivering, upon whom we depend for our daily sustenance. These splendid fellows are the Bottle-fillers of the nation. The debt we owe to them is all too rarely acknowledged. Perhaps Mr. Noble's stirring narrative, so intensely vivid, so irrefutably true, may help us to realise its magnitude.

" Denis O'Hagan engages our sympathy from the first

page to the last. Quick of temper, as befits an Irishman, he may be; ever ready to fight and without subtlety. But his is the tough fibre, the bluff vigour, the resolute decision, and the resource which, embodying a type, have made England mistress of the seas. Breathlessly, for the story is alive in every paragraph, do we follow the brief career of this young shipmaster on the *Sphinx*, the tragedy attending that ill-starred vessel, the fight for honour which captain and mate make in vain before the court of inquiry, its sequel, and the vindication of the hero. Listen to the Bottle-filler, as, oblivious of his counsel's advice, he blurts out the truth before the naval assessors. They had accused him of giving way to temper :—

“ ‘I want you to understand the position, sir. I want you to recognise that a man is not made of cast-iron because he happens to be in command. You see, our deck cargo had broken adrift, and I was rather put to it to secure it. You can never be certain what will happen when your deck-load is slithering about. Then two of our poor devils had got smashed up while trying to secure it . . . and I had to mend them. It isn't easy to explain what this means; but you must understand that it was blowing a gale and the seas were sweeping over us. A man could not move across the deck without running the risk of being washed overboard or knocked silly.’

“ ‘Never were the ancient sea virtues more rigorously tested or more heroically vindicated. Mr. Noble compels us to be proud of our Mercantile Marine. His tribute to the unruffled stoicism of its members, wrapt in the fascinating garb of fiction, is a timely rebuke to our indifference. Nor is this tale, so patiently real and so penetrating in its perception, without its service to authority. Some of the factors with which it treats, the load-line and deck-load for example, may belong to the dormant past; but if it helps shipowners, as well as the public, to realise the pressing need for reform in many departments of our carrying trade, the purpose of ‘The Bottle-Fillers’ will have been accomplished.”—*Daily Telegraph*.

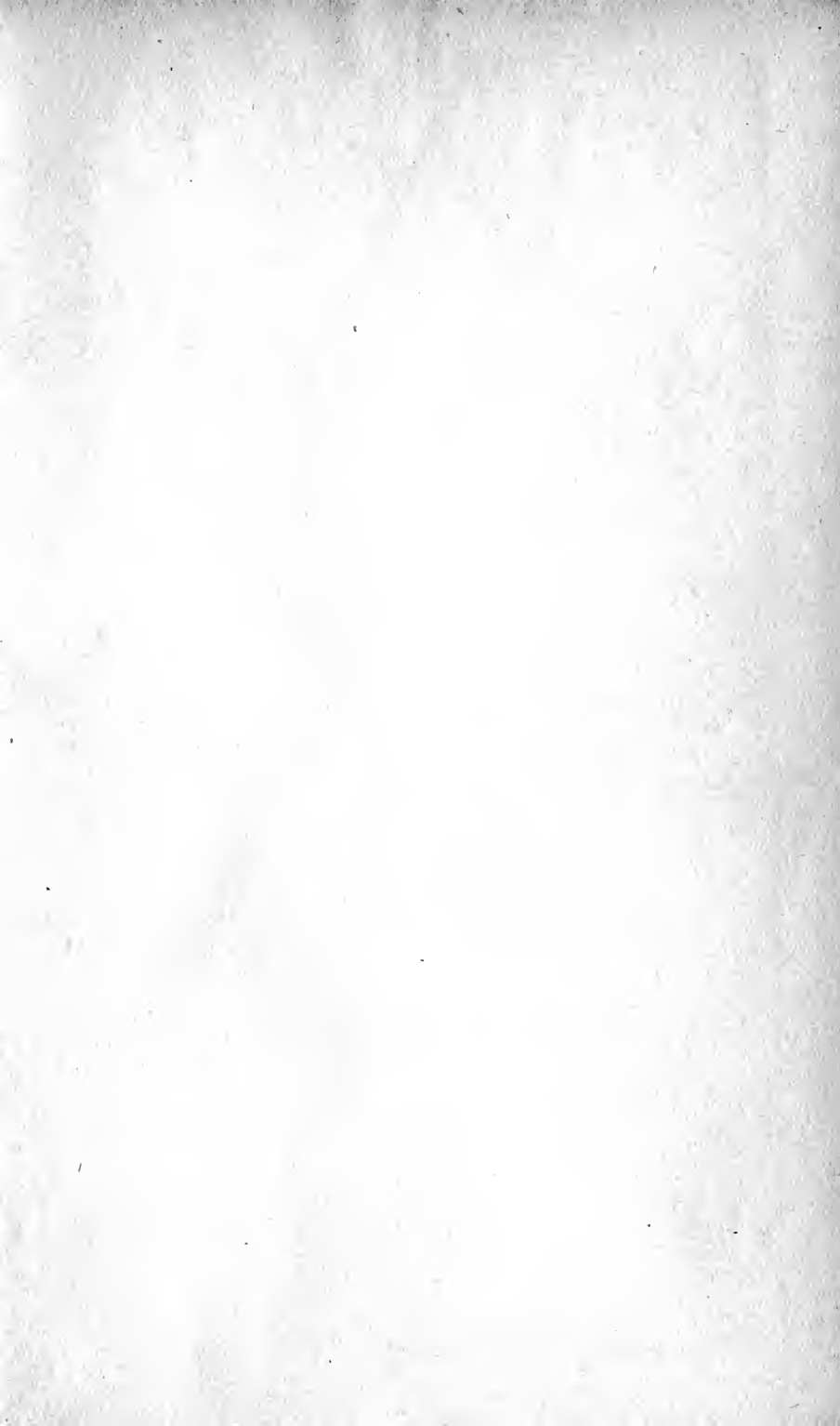
“The novel with a purpose, we are told, is the self-conscious offspring of the pretentious intellectual. So it often is, if we attach a modish significance to the word

‘purpose.’ But give it its obvious meaning, and I will go so far as to say that no novel without some kind of purpose—moral, æsthetic or social, and, at best, all three in unison—is worth sixpence, much less six shillings, and that one of the curses of this generation is a surfeit of fiction without any purpose at all. Mr. Noble’s new book, then, is a novel with a purpose. It is the most legitimate tradition to dramatise man in conflict with and the prey of fate. Nowadays, when the man in possession so frequently usurps the prerogative of fate, and a more vindictive fate, the novelist is surely only preserving the continuity of the orthodox by giving his destiny a residence in Park Lane. In ‘The Bottle-Fillers’ the shipowner Sharum wields a scorpion fate over the head of Captain O’Hagan of the Mercantile Marine. Sharum induces O’Hagan to invest £500 in his ship, the *Sphinx*, without mentioning that she is heavily mortgaged. The captain loses the *Sphinx* in a gale owing to the extra weight of a deck cargo. His certificate is suspended for six months, thanks to Sharum’s discreet agents, and he is black-listed at Lloyd’s. So the captain starves and loses his child . . . this in the bald scaffolding of a review is the substance of Mr. Noble’s story . . . The book as a whole has power at the helm and sincerity and conviction at the prow. If its psychology is rather obvious, it keeps away from mechanical conventions, and its purpose, as it should in a well-regulated novel, rather intensifies than encroaches upon the descriptive qualities.”—HAROLD MASSINGHAM in *Daily News*.

“OUTPOSTS OF THE FLEET.”—“Mr. Noble, as you may remember, is the author of ‘The Bottle-Fillers,’ which we published last year and of which the *Globe* said, ‘it is real salt and spindrift, the sea as the sea is when a living is being wrung from it.’ This new book from his pen deals not with the saucy fleet of battleships and destroyers, but with the Merchant Service; with the adventures of British tars with German submarines, cruisers and mines; and with the little tramps, without which the British cupboard would be bare. Do you remember the call of the sea and the thrill of that passage in ‘The Light that Failed’ where Dick listens to the throb of a great ship working down Channel? There is the same

thrill in one of Mr. Noble's stories, 'Torpedoed.' We get a picture of a liner pushing for the East, leaving a track of foam beads in her wake . . . glum, soundless, save for the thud of her engines. There is a faint cry in the darkness. The captain knows the tricks of the merciless submarine, but rather than take the chance of leaving a handful of men, and possible women, adrift in an open boat, he swings his ship and heads for the light; what follows is for those who would read."—From the *Piper*, Boston, Mass.

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